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KING ALFRED'S JEWEL



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LIFE AND TIMES
ALFRED THE GREAT,

WRITTEN
FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS

INCLUDING THE HISTORY OF HIS REIGN BY FIRST LIEUTENANT

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

ALFRED'S WILL AND PROVERBS, IN SAXON, WITH TRANSLATIONS;
THE TREATY BETWEEN ALFRED AND GUTHRUM, IN SAXON;
FURTHER LETTER TO ALFRED; ALFRED'S PREFACE TO
HIS OWN PASTORAL CARE, IN SAXON, WITH A
TRANSLATION; A CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY
OF ANGLO-SAXON HISTORY; DESCRIPTIVE
NOTES OF ALFRED'S COIN, WITH COLOURED
PLATES.

REV. J. A. GILES, D.D.

OF THE CHURCH OF C. C. C. OXFORD;
AUTHOR OF THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF THOMAS A. BECKET,
AND EDITOR OF PATRES ECCLESIAE ANGLICANAÆ.

SECOND EDITION.

OXFORD:
PUBLISHED BY W. BAXTER,
AND BY G. WILKES, GREAT PIAZZA, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON.
MDCCCIV.



LIFE AND TIMES

OF

ALFRED THE GREAT,

DRAWN UP

FROM THE MOST AUTHENTIC ANCIENT CHRONICLERS,

AND

INCLUDING IMPORTANT FACTS NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

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FULK'S LETTER TO ALFRED; ALFRED'S PREFACE TO
GREGORY'S PASTORAL CARE, IN SAXON, WITH A
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John Allen BY
REV. J. A. GILES, D. C. L.

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1875, March 22.

Walker Bequest.

TO
GENERAL SIR JOHN SLADE, BARONET,
OF MONTYS COURT, NEAR TAUNTON,
AND PROPRIETOR OF THE ISLE OF ATHELNEY,
THIS
LIFE OF ALFRED THE GREAT
IS INSCRIBED,
IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PIOUS CARE
WITH WHICH HIS FAMILY
HAVE IDENTIFIED AND POINTED OUT TO FUTURE AGES
THE LONELY SPOT
WHERE
THE GREATEST OF ENGLISH KINGS
FOUND A TEMPORARY REFUGE FROM HIS ENEMIES.

J. A. G.

Bampton, Oct. 26, 1848.

P R E F A C E.

To write the life of a King who was born a thousand years ago, but whose name is as fresh in the mouths of Englishmen as if he had lived in our own times, is an undertaking which, at first sight, may appear perilous to the writer, and more likely to obscure than to illustrate the splendid achievements of his hero. It has been, perhaps, from a feeling of this sort that, if we except one or two short and hasty sketches, no one for more than two hundred years has ventured to delineate, in a full and elaborate work, the life and actions of our favourite King, Alfred the Great.

Neither can it be pleaded in defence of the present work that its author has had superior advantages, or possesses any peculiar talents for succeeding in a labour from which so many preceding writers have shrunk. He may however be allowed to state, that there is one circumstance, likely to have deterred others, which has had a contrary effect upon himself. The want of competent original records may deter an abler pen from being employed on a subject which would give little scope for historical talent,

though it might furnish ample subject for the Poet or the Novelist. Such is the deficiency of original evidence for the splendid deeds of King Alfred, that no one but Sir John Spelman has made them the subject of a separate study; and as his work, from the length of time that has passed since it was written, has become obsolete as regards the train of thought which pervades it, and also, from his less perfect knowledge of records which have been better developed since his time, is deficient in fact, there seems to be a reasonable ground for believing, that a new work on this subject may be favourably received by those who wish to see the history of their country illustrated with faithful adherence to the accounts which our ancient Chroniclers have left us. Those who know what patient research is required to thread the mazes of a hundred old authors, to compare their statements, to select one and to reject another, will not lightly treat with contempt the contents of this volume. Few writers can hope that the public will take equal interest with themselves in the hero whose life they have attempted to describe: but this shall not deter me from inviting the attention of those who read History, to a volume which contains the fullest account that has yet appeared of the actions of one of the greatest kings that the world has ever seen. If, however, no more merit than that of its completeness could be claimed for this work, it ought not on that account to be thought a superfluous addition to our literary stores; for that which, to all practical purposes, is new, may perhaps be any

thing but superfluous ; nor can I be fairly censured as having wasted the labour which has been bestowed in writing a work that has not been written before. But, though it might have been excusable if I had no pretensions to have discovered any new facts on a subject so trite as the present, yet it is my belief that I have discovered a new fact, not only of importance, but of the greatest importance, in explaining one of the most interesting parts of Alfred's life. I allude to the obscurity which hangs over the third invasion of Wessex by the Danes in January 878, when Alfred, from being at the head of a gallant army, suddenly found himself a fugitive and an exile. As it would be useless to explain this more fully in a preface, the reader is referred to the fourteenth chapter, where the subject is discussed at length.

It would be improper to dismiss the work without saying something of the sources from which it is drawn, and of the extent to which I have followed the ancient authorities. The task is easy ; for the list of these authorities is short. The ancient writings which come the nearest to the age of Alfred the Great are the *Life of Alfred* by Asser, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and the *Chronicle of Ethelwerd*. All these are so well known to those who are acquainted with books, that they require but little description. Asser, being contemporary with Alfred, may be supposed to claim the greatest attention to what he relates ; his work will recur to our notice in almost every page of this volume. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is supposed to have been begun in

the time of Alfred, if not sooner, and to have received additions in every following generation, down to the year 1154. Ethelwerd was of princely birth, and related to the family of King Alfred. His work, though it contains little beyond what is to be found in Asser or the Saxon Chronicle, is a valuable commentary on their text, and occasionally notices facts which are recorded no where else. He wrote soon after the death of Alfred. The next writers in point of time, to whom we are indebted for a knowledge of these early times, are Florence of Worcester, Simeon of Durham, and Henry of Huntingdon, all of whom lived soon after the Norman Conquest, and have apparently more or less copied from some common authority. Each of them, however, contributes some new fact, and neither of them may be rejected without loss to a subject, which can only be satisfactorily developed by a reference to all the authorities which have come down to us. These six Chronicles appear to me of primary importance, and have been always quoted before any other in the following work, concerning events which either or any of them have mentioned.

A valuable supplement to these six Chronicles may occasionally be found in Ingulf of Croyland Abbey, who is also next to them in time. William of Malmesbury gives little additional information concerning Alfred, but his mode of grouping facts is sometimes of service. Roger de Wendover, Matthew of Westminster, and John Brompton, who lived many years later, must also not be despised

or neglected. To these authors I have in general confined myself for all that concerns facts and original views of Alfred's life and actions; and a multitude of other writers have been consulted on particular subjects, whose names it is not necessary to enumerate.

But it would have been highly culpable not to notice the valuable aid which has been derived from Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, Lappenberg's work on the same subject, and Spelman's old and quaint, but useful, Life of Alfred. I have taken the liberty of quoting, whenever it appeared necessary, from all these writers, but seldom or never, without affixing the name of the author quoted. If either of the two first, or Dr. Lingard, the nature of whose work would not allow him to devote more than a few pages to the reign of Alfred, should find that I have quoted them for the purpose of pointing out a supposed error, there is little doubt that their enlightened minds will approve rather than condemn such a mode of weighing authorities and contrasting opinions, when the discovery of truth, and not the propagation of a theory, is the object which has been kept in view.

It is perhaps superfluous to mention, what will occur to any one who reads a few pages of this volume, that I have preferred, wherever it was possible, to make the ancient Chroniclers tell their own story in their own words. This mode, which I have adopted in former books*, has attracted much notice

* The Life and Letters of Thomas à Becket, and the History of the Ancient Britons.

from the Reviewers, some of whom have approved whilst others have condemned it. Where ancient authorities abound, such a mode would of course involve much repetition, and cause many difficulties; but where there is a single authentic account of a particular event left us by an eye-witness, it is dangerous to depart from the exact form of words in which that eye-witness has told his tale. The mode has been adhered to in this "Life of Alfred;" and the reader will not regret that I have adopted a plan, to which he is indebted for the numerous little graphic scenes from Asser, of something nearly resembling domestic history, which are interwoven in this work.

J. A. G.

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THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF
ALFRED THE GREAT.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION—SLOW PROGRESS OF MIGRATIONS BY SEA—SAXON
INVASION OF BRITAIN—SEVEN SAXON KINGDOMS—THEIR SEPARATE
EXISTENCE FROM ABOUT A.D. 500 TO 800—THEIR DISCORDS.

THE Ocean, placed by Nature as a barrier between the nations of the earth, presented, in ancient times, a formidable impediment to the migratory tendencies of mankind. The newly-discovered country, which is divided by the sea from the old-established habitations of the human race, has many a chance of defending its liberties, in the difficulty with which a large fleet, capable of conveying a sufficient number of invaders, can be constructed, or the stores be procured with which they are to be maintained. This may account for the disproportion, which we observe between those migrations which have been conducted by land, and others which have necessarily taken place by sea. Whilst Gaul, Italy, Spain, and Greece, have been at different times overrun, and their destruction threatened, by millions of Goths, Gauls, Huns, and other northern

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barbarians, the island of Britain, protected by the friendly Ocean, has never at any time been subjected to the invasion of a mighty army, capable at one stroke of crushing its liberties, and extirpating its ancient inhabitants. It has, rather, been harassed for centuries by small bodies of pirates, and other plunderers, coming in such a number of vessels as their means could provide them with; and in this manner its population has, two or three times within the period of authentic history, gradually been displaced by new-comers.

When Julius Cæsar, the earliest civilized invader of Britain, first reached our shores, he found all the south of the island occupied by Belgic tribes, akin to those which lined the opposite coasts of the continent, from the Seine, nearly, to the Elbe. As Cæsar has nowhere made mention of a diversity of language or of manners, as coming within the range of his own observation, it is probable—and the tone of his narrative makes it almost certain—that the Belgic tribes occupied a very large part of Britain, certainly much more of it than that to which Cæsar's own operations were confined. History does not inform us when the Belgæ first began to encroach on the land of Britain; and it is useless to conjecture, where we have not a single fact to form the basis of the enquiry. But we shall be safe in referring the first arrival of Belgians to an early date, because we find, that the more recent changes which Britain has experienced, and of which history furnishes the details, were only effected after a long and painful series of wars and rebellions between the natives and their invaders. Thus, when the Romans had left Britain, and its inhabitants resumed the exercise of their ancient liberty, the Saxon tribes,

which, even under the Roman dominion, had apparently marked out this island as their future conquest, began to press with greater energy to effect its subjugation. Yet a hundred and fifty years still intervened before they gained secure possession of that part of the island which is now called England, and two large provinces of it, namely, Cumberland and Cornwall, remained many years longer in the occupation of the Britons.

At what period the Saxon adventurers first began to commit depredations on the south coasts of Britain, and what time elapsed before they established their dominion in the island, it is not the province of this work to relate. But it is of great importance to our present purpose to shew, that the Saxon commonwealth in Britain never enjoyed, for more than a few years at a time, repose from intestine war or foreign invasion.

In fact, the Saxon monarchs, who were most distinguished for their bravery and patriotism, can be regarded in no other point of view than as serving, by a continued struggle against wars and difficulties, to uphold and maintain a state not yet settled on a firm and lasting basis.

A hundred and fifty years after the first landing of Hengist and Horsa, we find seven Saxon kingdoms established in South Britain. And it is worthy of remark, that the kings of these petty states often regarded one another with more jealousy than the British chiefs, who still maintained independence in Wales, Cumberland, and Cornwall. This fact seems to go far to confirm the theory, that there was less dissimilarity both of language and manners between the Saxons and Britons, than prevails at the present day between their

descendants. However this may be, the same fact leads us, at all events, to the melancholy inference, which all history too sadly confirms, that the ties of kindred are snapt asunder without difficulty, by nations as well as by individuals, when they interfere with those views of cupidity or aggrandisement, which are but too familiar to the human breast.

The Saxon Heptarchy—as the seven kingdoms at this time existing in England are commonly denominated—never shewed signs of durability: nor were their chiefs ever possessed of an equal share of power. It is probable, that jealousy of each other contributed much to prolong their separate existence, until the time of Egbert, a period of nearly three hundred years. Another cause which served to produce the same effect may be found in the scanty population which was at that time spread over the country, and probably also in the natural barriers, inlets of the sea, ridges of chalk downs, woods, heaths, and morasses, which separated the different states. Thus the western frontier of Kent was protected by the dense wood of Anderida—coeval with the Roman dominion—from the South Saxons, who, occupying the cultivated parts of Sussex close upon the south coast, were in their turn separated by the Southampton water, and other inlets of the sea near Portsmouth, from being easily invaded by the inhabitants of Wessex. In a similar manner the East Anglians, occupying the modern counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, and protected on their right by the Wash with its mighty inundations, and on the left by the estuary of the Thames, were secure from most of the discords which arose between the other states, and seemed almost to form another island by themselves. Again, the powerful northern kingdom

of Northumbria, safe from an enemy in its rear, because there was at that time no people beyond it whose power the Northumbrian monarchs could fear, was exposed to hostility on the south and south-west by the proximity of the native Britons, and the powerful Saxon kingdom of Mercia, which occupying the centre of the island, in the very middle of the other kindred states, was at all times liable to come into contact with each of them, and seldom, in fact, enjoyed a long interval of tranquillity.

The duration of the Saxon Heptarchy is a subject of much interest to the historian, because the records which we possess concerning it, though much more meagre than we could desire, are nevertheless by far more ample and explicit than those which any other country can produce of equal antiquity. The History of the Heptarchy, in fact, presents us with a picture of that intermediate state of national existence, which occupies the interval between a patriarchal tribe, and a state consolidated under a regular government. We see in it the elements out of which a powerful society was one day to be formed, and, if those elements had not all been in such rapid motion—if they had exhibited more of inertness or sooner settled into a passive state, like some of the Asiatic communities, which for thousands of years have suffered no variation of character—the Saxon people of the seven kingdoms might have been spared many sufferings, which were caused them by the restlessness and ambition of their rulers, but would scarcely have been the ancestors of that mighty people, their present descendants, who have covered the whole earth with their arts, arms, and civilization.

CHAP. II.

THE HEPTARCHY—ONE OF THE KINGDOMS GENERALLY PREDOMINANT—
THE EIGHT BRETWALDAS—OFFA THE POWERFUL KING OF MERCIA—
DISTRACTED STATE OF WESSEX—SIGEBERT—CYNEWOLF—CYNEARD
—THE COMBAT AT MERTON—EGFRID AND KENWULF, KINGS OF
MERCIA; BERTRIC AND EGBERT, OF WESSEX.

BUT, though the kingdoms of the Saxon Heptarchy in England continued for three hundred years to enjoy a separate existence and sovereignty, there was generally one of their monarchs, who, from superior ability, the favour of fortune, and many other causes, enjoyed a sort of preeminence, not perhaps well ascertained and marked out within certain limits, but rather a virtual superiority over the other sovereigns. This fact is evident from the agreement of all the historians, and it is explicitly stated in that valuable record of the times, the Saxon Chronicle; “King Egbert,” such are the words of the Chronicle^a, “was the eighth king who was Bretwalda^b: Ælla, king of the South Saxons, was the first who possessed this dominion: the second was Ceaulin, king of the West Saxons; the third was Ethelbert, king of the Kentish men; the fourth was Redwald, king of the East Angles; the fifth was Edwin, king of the Northumbrians; the sixth was Oswald, who reigned after him;

^a Saxon Chron. A.D. 827.

^b This word means *Sovereign lord*, or *Emperor*.

the seventh was Oswy, Oswald's brother; the eighth was Egbert, king of the West Saxons."

It must not, however, be supposed, that the number *seven* accurately describes the separate Saxon monarchies established in this island. During a portion, at least, of the time which the Heptarchy lasted, there were eight separate states, whenever the two provinces of Northumberland, Deur and Berneich—or, in their Latinized form, Deira and Bernicia—were governed each by its own sovereign. On the other hand, it is equally certain, that, at different times, two or more of the other Saxon states were occasionally united, by a transient superiority of one or the other, under one king, at whose death the ill-cemented union gave way, and the separate states again enjoyed each its own government.

Of the Saxon kingdoms established in Britain, Kent, Sussex, Essex, and East-Anglia, though occasionally contending with the others for the pre-eminence, were on the whole so limited in extent, that they had little chance of establishing a dynasty which should unite the whole island under their dominion. The contest therefore for ultimate superiority lay between the larger states, Wessex, Mercia, and Northumberland; and it seems difficult to discover any peculiar advantages belonging to either of these, which gave it a better chance than the others of becoming predominant in the struggle. It remained therefore for some lucky conjuncture of affairs, or some prince of superior talents, to arise, who should give one of these states a preponderance over the other two, its rivals. Such a result seemed likely to be brought about by the powerful Offa, who governed Mercia during a long reign of thirty-nine

years, from A.D. 755 to 794. The state of Wessex, also, at this time was favourable to the designs—if the Mercian king had formed any—of universal sovereignty. The unhappy condition of the West-Saxon kingdom may be gathered from the tragic scenes which were enacted by its nobles. In 754—the year before Offa succeeded to the throne of Mercia—Sigebert seized on the government of Wessex, vacant by the death of Cuthred^c, but before the end of the year, his cruelty towards his subjects, together with that cowardice which so often is united with tyranny, rendered his rule no longer tolerable to his people, and Sigebert was driven into exile. The insurrection was headed by his own kinsman Cynewolf, and was sanctioned by a solemn decree of the West-Saxon Witenagemot^d, or Parliament, which deprived the exiled monarch for ever of the crown. In compassion, however, for this sudden reverse of fortune, there were still found some who adhered to the cause of the deposed king, and the county of Hampshire was given over to Sigebert in separate sovereignty. But this unworthy man was unable to cast off those habits which had before made him obnoxious to the people, or he had not learnt wisdom by experience. Among the very staunchest of his followers was one Cumbra, or Cumbran, who had adhered to him with unshaken fidelity; and the wretch, for whom he had shewn so much zeal, now requited his services by imbruing his hands in the blood of his faithful servant. For this crime no motive has been assigned; and we may therefore believe that it was one of those wanton acts which have in all ages occasionally occurred to give a deeper

^c Saxon Chron. 754. William of Malmesbury.

^d Saxon Chron. 755.

dye to the iniquity of tyrants. But an avenger of the murdered Alderman—for such was Cumbra's dignity—was not wanting. Cynewolf, the West-Saxon king, no doubt looked with satisfaction on an overt act, which lent him an excuse for putting a finishing-stroke to the career of his hated rival. Sigebert was driven out from the province which had been assigned to him, and in the forest of Andred, like the prodigal son, is said to have found a subsistence in the company of the swine and the wild beasts. Here he dwelt some time, until a swine-herd, provoked probably by some petulance of the degraded but savage-minded prince, at a place called Privett's flood*, stabbed him to the heart with his knife.

The successful Cynewolf was thus the undisturbed sovereign of the West-Saxon kingdom; but it was not probable that a state, which had undergone so many intestine convulsions, should be able to cope with its powerful neighbour Mercia, led by a man of such talents and vigour as king Offa. Accordingly, in the twenty-fourth year of his reign, Cynewolf was worsted in a great battle, fought at Bensington against Offa, and the military power of the kingdom of Wessex was much shattered by this defeat. In the year 784, which was the thirty-first of Cynewolf's reign, another domestic tragedy threw a deeper shade over the royal family of Wessex. There was a prince—or Etheling, as the Saxon phraseology describes him—among the nobles of Wessex, whose increasing power gave alarm to the reigning king. This was Cyneard, a brother of the murdered Sigebert; and though so many years had now passed away without any attempt on the part of the Etheling to disturb the tranquillity of the state, yet

* Still called Privett, in Hampshire.

Cynewolf, for no apparent cause, compelled Cyneard to leave the country. The Etheling, yielding to the emergency of the times, departed without delay, as if acquiescing in his fate; but, as the sequel shewed, he had already determined, when an opportunity should occur, to take vengeance on his enemy for this unprovoked aggression. Such an opportunity speedily presented itself: Cynewolf was in the habit of paying visits to a female who lived at Merton. Soon after the expulsion of Cyneard, the king made a journey to Merton, accompanied by a very small escort. Tidings of this were soon carried to Cyneard, who had already assembled a band of desperadoes around him, and was only waiting to strike a blow at the tyrant who had injured him. The present opportunity was not to be let slip. The Etheling, gathering his band, beset the house¹ on all sides, before the thanes and followers of the king could prevent it. Cynewolf, hastily consulting with those who were about him, shut the doors, and prepared to parley with the enemy, whom he hoped to terrify by threats of punishment, or to mollify by fair language. Neither mode of acting succeeded, and Cynewolf perceived that he must owe his safety to his sword, until perchance his faithful thanes could come to his rescue. Taking his stand, therefore, at the door, he manfully defended himself for some time, until he beheld the Etheling among those who were assailing him. His indignation was roused at the sight, and he rushed upon him with that courage in which, whatever were his other failings, Cynewolf had never been deficient.

¹ There is a slight difficulty here in reconciling the account given in the Saxon Chronicle with that of William of Malmesbury. The Chronicle says that Cyneard's band beset the very chamber in which the king was: Malmesbury makes them beset the house generally.

In the fury and suddenness of the assault Cyneard was severely wounded, but he was saved from death by the interposition of his followers, who, though with much difficulty, and after a severe contest, at length slew the king. Such of his attendants as were with him, refusing to yield, and eager to avenge the death of their lord, shared the same fate. But whilst this was passing, the woman, who had been the occasion of all this, was shrieking aloud for assistance: and the king's thanes, who were not far off, hastened, each as quickly as he was able, to the spot. The Etheling first attempted to argue the case, and offered them their lives, and a sum of money to each; but it was all to no purpose, not one of them would listen to any compromise, and a general battle took place. The king's followers were all slain except one, a Briton, whom Cynewolf had formerly received as a hostage from the Welsh, and he also was severely wounded.

The next day, intelligence of the king's death was spread far and near, and others of the king's thanes, whom he had left behind him, hastened to the spot. Among these was Osric, an Alderman, and a thane named Wiferth[§]. When they arrived at Merton, the Etheling was still there, and the gates were closed against them. Cyneard also began again to parley, for his object now was, and probably had been so from the first, to secure for himself the crown which had been once worn by his brother. To this end, he made large offers of land and money to the thanes, if they would consent to his wishes; pointing out to them also, that several of their kinsmen were on his side, ready to fight

[§] This is the account given by the Saxon Chronicle: Malmesbury has blended together the transactions of the two days, and he calls Osric, "Eric, a man famous for his old age and prudence."

in his cause. To this the king's party replied, that they loved their deceased master better than all their kinsmen, and they would never submit themselves to his murderer; but they earnestly advised those of their kinsmen who were with the Etheling, to leave him to his fate. To which Cyneard's men answered, that this proposition had been put the day before by themselves to those who had fought for the king, and not one of the king's men would accept it. Surely, therefore, they could not now do otherwise than follow so brave an example, and live or die with their lord.

These recriminations served only to exasperate the two parties, and a struggle ensued about the gate. The king's party at last forced their way in, and slew the Etheling with all his men, except one, who was the Alderman's godson: and even he hardly escaped with his life, for he was wounded in several places^b.

The affray at Mertonⁱ deprived of life both the rivals for the crown of Wessex, which was immediately occupied by Bertric, a descendant of the royal house of Cerdic. Three years afterwards, in 787, the new king married Edburga^k, daughter of Offa king of

^b The Saxon Chronicle mentions the Alderman's godson, and William of Malmesbury gives us the account of the British hostage who was saved alive from the battle of the preceding day. I have introduced both accounts into the narrative, but I suspect they are the same story.

ⁱ In this massacre were slain no fewer than eighty-four persons, besides king Cynewolf and his rival Cyneard: it took place in the year 784; but it is curious, that both the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Ethelwerd relate it by anticipation, under the year 755, proving, even if the fact were otherwise doubtful, that these two chronicles have been copied the one from the other, or that both are derived from a common source.

^k The romantic history of this incontinent and wicked princess

Mercia, by which event the two most powerful of the Saxon kingdoms were for a time cemented by an

has been handed down to us by Simeon of Durham in the following narrative.

“As the honoured daughter of so great a monarch, Edburga entertained the most ambitious views, living in kingly state like her father, and treating every one who approached her with vituperation: by which means she speedily became an object of detestation, not only to the nobles and magistrates, but to the whole people. The clergy in particular were the objects of her enmity, and she brought continual accusations against them before the king her husband, whom she had by her wiles so completely brought under her control, that those who were accused seldom escaped without suffering banishment or death. If at any time she ever found the king deaf to her solicitations, she seized the earliest opportunity of taking off by poison the object of her malice. An instance of her wickedness occurred in the case of a young man who possessed great wealth, and was a favourite with the king. Not being able to persuade her husband to listen to her accusations, she mixed the fatal cup which was to deprive the youth of life. But the king, unwittingly, tasted of its contents, and the chief duke at his court also drank thereof, by which means both of them perished from the effects of the deadly draught. The wicked queen who had concocted the poison, alarmed at the consequences, fled beyond the sea with all her treasures to the court of Charles, the famous king of France. Here she was introduced into his presence, and standing before him in the gallery of his palace, offered him a rich present from the treasures which she had brought. The king addressed her thus: ‘Which would you rather have, Edburg, me, or my son who stands with me in the gallery?’ Edburga, without thinking, replied hastily: ‘If I had my choice, I would rather have him than you, because he is younger.’ To which Charles is said to have answered: ‘If you had chosen me, you should have had my son; but as you chose him, you shall have neither me nor him for your friend.’ The king, however, on account of her abandoned character, placed her at the head of a famous convent, where she exchanged her secular robes for the habit of the nuns; and she here for a few years, under a specious exterior, discharged the duties of her station; but as her life had been depraved and execrable in her own country, so did she become still more

alliance, which probably saved Wessex from the subjugation to which its distracted state would otherwise naturally have exposed it. It would have been a fortunate circumstance for all the Saxon kingdoms, if this union could have been the nucleus of a general combination; for it was at this very time that an enemy, hitherto unknown, afterwards the harbinger of havoc and desolation, first landed upon the island.

The account of this event is given by the historian Ethelwerd¹, more fully than by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. "Whilst the pious king Bertric was reigning over the western parts of the English, and the innocent people, dispersed throughout their fields, were enjoying themselves in tranquillity, and yoking their oxen to the plough, suddenly there arrived on the coast a fleet of Danes, not large, but of three ships only: this was their first arrival. When this became known, the king's officer, who was already stopping in the town of Dorchester, leaped on his horse, and galloped forward with a few men to the port, thinking

wicked and abandoned in the country where she was a sojourner. The poet says,

The summer's heat makes ripe the corn,
And fruits do autumn's head adorn;
The storms descend, when winter reigns,
And deluges th' extended plains.

But this abandoned woman could not be restrained, either by summer's heat or winter's cold, from the gratification of her passions. After a short time, she committed adultery with one of her own countrymen,and being expelled by king Charles, in much anguish and tribulation of mind, from the holy place of her residence, brought her life to a close in the midst of poverty, wretchedness, and contempt. She withdrew, accompanied by a single servant, to Pavia, where, after begging her bread from door to door in the cities and castles of that country, she at last miserably perished."

¹ Ethelw. Chron. lib. iii.

that they were merchants rather than enemies, and, commanding them in an authoritative tone, ordered them to be made to go to the royal city; but he was slain on the spot by them, and all who were with him. The name of the officer was Beaduherd^m." This act of aggression roused the neighbouring people to vengeance: the peasantry and others flocked together in large numbers, and the Danish marauders, neglecting their booty, took refuge in their shipsⁿ, where they were safe from pursuit; for the Anglo-Saxons, during the three hundred years which they had spent in Britain, had lost all knowledge of maritime affairs.

After a reign of sixteen years, king Bertric died^o, and was succeeded by Egbert, the last surviving member of the royal house of Wessex. This young man, as we learn from William of Malmesbury, had been driven out of Wessex by the late king Bertric, who looked upon him as an impediment to his peaceful enjoyment of the sovereignty. "For both Bertric himself, and all the other kings of Wessex since the time of Ina, though justly proud of their royal origin from Cerdic, had nevertheless deviated somewhat from the right line of descent^p," whereas Egbert, as it would appear, was descended from an elder branch, and, if the right of primogeniture were allowed, might be thought to possess a better claim than Bertric to their paternal sovereignty. It is not unlikely, also, that the

^m He is called *reve*, i. e. shire-reve or sheriff, by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: the Danes also are termed Northmen, and their country Hærethaland.

ⁿ Will. Malmesb. lib. i. §. 43.

^o In 802, for the generally received date, 800, is liable to many difficulties, which need not here be mentioned.

^p Will. Malmes. i. 43.

abilities which Egbert afterwards developed, began already to shew themselves; nor would the "piety," which the historian ascribes to Bertric, be deemed a sufficient protection against aggression, or deter him from ensuring his repose by the death or exile of a competitor. More than twelve years, however, had passed, and when Bertric, in 802, resigned his life and his crown together, the injured Egbert succeeded to the throne, which he speedily elevated, not only above that of Mercia, by the strength of whose alliance he had formerly been exiled¹, but also above that of every other king in Britain. The affairs of Mercia, meantime, may be despatched in a short summary. Offa, deservedly styled the Great, had died eight years before Egbert came to the throne of Wessex; and his son Egfrid, who was crowned during his father's lifetime, made way by death, after a few months, for the accession of their kinsman Kenwulf, grandson of Penda in the fifth degree by his brother Kenwalck. The new king was a brave and able man, and might have proved a formidable antagonist to Egbert; but his attention was called off to the kingdom of Kent, against which he imbibed the feelings of hostility, which had formerly been entertained by Offa, and already, in 796, four years before the accession of Egbert, he had dethroned Edbert Pren, and substituted Cuthred in his place as sovereign of that kingdom². If we are to believe, that Kenwulf reigned thirteen years³ without being

¹ Ethelwerdi Chron. lib. iii.

² Cujus [i. e. Offæ] affinitate fultus, Egbertum solum regalis prosapiæ superstitem, quem validissimum suis utilitatibus metuebat obicem, Franciam fugandum curavit. Will. Malmes. i. 43.

³ Will. Malmes. i. 95.

⁴ From 802 to 815. Altogether Kenwulf reigned 21 years, viz. from 794 to 815.

engaged in war with Wessex, of which Egbert was, during all that time, the king, we may suppose that the decline of Mercia, which after Kenwolf's death is said to have manifested itself^u, had already commenced, whilst that king still lived. Neither is it difficult to account for this fact: a state which is entirely cut off from communication with the sea, and is open on all sides to the attacks of enemies, seldom attains to greatness, but is, on the contrary, exposed to continual spoliation of its territories, because it has no basis from which to direct its operations on any one point, but must ever turn its attention to any quarter on which its enemies may chance to make an attack^x. Keolwolf, the brother of Kenwolf, reigned one year over the Mercian kingdom, and was then expelled by Bernwolf, whose reign was terminated in its third year, by the course of events which placed Egbert at the head of all the Saxon kingdoms in England.

^u Post illum regnum Merciorum nutabundum, et, ut ita dicam, exangue, nihil quod litera dignetur comminisci habuit. Will. Malmes. i. 96.

^x Many striking examples of this are furnished by the history of modern Europe: Germany, Poland, and Hungary, have no frontier defended by nature, and consequently are less stable than France, Spain, England, &c.

CHAP. III.

REIGN OF EGBERT, KING OF WESSEX, FROM A.D. 802 TO 839.—EIGHTH
BRETWALDA, OR LORD PARAMOUNT OF ENGLAND, AFTER A.D. 823.—
HIS EXILE IN FRANCE, AND RETURN TO ENGLAND—HIS CORONATION
—THE SKIRMISH AT KEMPSFORD—HIS INVASION OF CORNWALL—
REVOLUTIONS IN MERCA—TREATY BETWEEN WESSEX AND EAST
ANGLIA—BATTLE AT ELLANDUNE—KINGDOMS OF KENT, ESSEX, AND
SUSSEX, SUBMIT TO EGBERT—BERNWOLF AND LUDECAN, KINGS OF
MERCA, DEFEATED AND SLAIN BY THE EAST ANGLIANS—WIGLAF,
KING OF MERCA, TRIBUTARY TO EGBERT—NORTHUMBERLAND
SUBMITS—EGBERT INVADES WALES—FIRST INVASIONS OF THE
DANES—ORIGIN OF THE DANES, SAXONS, AND NORMANS—EGBERT'S
DEATH.

THE talents of Egbert, and—what is of still more importance to success—the necessity of strenuously exerting them, were roused to vigour by the adversity which attended his early life. As son of Almund, who at this time reigned in Kent^a, Egbert might appear more properly to be connected with Kent than Wessex, but as descended from Inigils, brother of Ina, Egbert could not forget that he might some day or other possess the sovereignty of the West, which was far more extensive and powerful than the narrow territory which his father ruled, possibly as a mere tributary to the king of Wessex. During the whole of Bertric's reign, Egbert was an object of well-grounded suspicion to the reigning prince, and was driven, by the persecution of his rival, to take refuge in France at the court of the emperor Charlemagne. This circum-

^a Sax. Ch. 784.

stance, however, was of inestimable advantage to the exile. The court and camp of a monarch, who had, by his own ability and exertions, restored the majesty of the Western Empire to something like its ancient elevation, were an admirable school to one, who had already at home given proof that he possessed talents hereafter to be actively developed. The ambition of Egbert was probably fired by what he saw in France; and he there laid the foundation of the success which followed him in after life, both in war and government. It is likely, too, that to Egbert was also due the re-introduction of learning, which for seventy years had slumbered in England since the days of Venerable Bede^b; for Charlemagne, like all other great princes, had planted seminaries for learning, at the same time that he trained his subjects in the science of war; and so distinguished an exile as Prince Egbert could hardly have passed several years in France without conversing with the celebrated Alcuin, who, himself an Anglo-Saxon by birth^c, but naturalised in France, was ever desirous of maintaining a connection, by letter or otherwise, with the land of his nativity. In conversation with this sage, whose life had been spent in more varied scenes than are generally witnessed by the inmates of the cloister, Egbert might have derived practical wisdom, which could not fail to be of use to him in his future life^d.

^b Venerable Bede died A.D. 735.

^c Alcuin was the most eminent writer in France, and indeed in all Europe, during the 8th and the 9th centuries; his works treat of almost every branch of human learning. He died Jan. 16, A.D. 804.

^d There is an observation, made apparently without any intention by the writer of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which seems to prove that learning revived in England after the reign of Egbert. Under

When therefore, in 802, the crimes of Queen Edburga deprived her husband Bertric of life*, Egbert hastened from France, and was unanimously received by the men of Wessex as the sole-surviving descendant of the line of Cerdic, and the rightful heir to the throne. The very day[†], also, on which Egbert was admitted to his royal dignity, was signalised by an engagement between some of his troops and a body of soldiers from the rival kingdom of Mercia. Ethelmund, the Alderman, or, as he would have been termed two hundred years after, the Earl, of Gloucester, attempted with a body of Mercians to pass the river Isis at Kempsford: but he was there encountered by Alderman Wextan at the head of the men of Wiltshire, who, after a fierce battle, repulsed the invaders: both the Aldermen fell in this battle.

This achievement was, however, rather an omen of the success which would attend Egbert's reign, than of any warlike dispositions in the breast of the new king. His reign was, indeed, at first singularly peaceful, and seems to have had for its object not so much the extension of his dominions by the sword, as their improvement and consolidation by the bless-

the year 784 we find the following passage: "At this time king Almund reigned in Kent: this king Almund was the father of Egbert; and Egbert was the father of Athulf [i. e. Ethelwolf]." It may be inferred, that the writer was living in the reign of Ethelwolf, when he wrote this passage; or he would probably have carried the genealogy lower. If this be correct, the first part of that valuable work, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, is probably due to the revival of literature introduced by king Egbert.

* See note k, in page 14.

[†] This event is recorded by the SAXON CH., ETHELWERD, FLORENCE, SIMEON, and HUNTINGDON; but Ethelwerd alone tells us that it happened on the day of Egbert's coronation.

ings of peace and good government. In 805 died Cuthred, king of Kent^g, probably the successor of Egbert's own father, Almund. In the following year King Ardwolf was expelled from Northumberland. With the exception of these and other unimportant facts, such as the death or appointment of several obscure bishops, abbats, and other ecclesiastics, the Saxon Annalists display a remarkable dearth of incidents for some years, and, to fill up the void, they give us notices of natural phænomena, some of which do as much credit to the liveliness of their imagination, as to the profundity of their scientific knowledge. In 806 the moon was eclipsed on the 1st of September, and in 809 the sun was obscured on the 16th of July. In the former year a cross is said to have appeared in the moon on the 4th of June, and the sun to have been surrounded by a miraculous circle on the 30th of August^a. If these and similar prodigies foretold wars and tumults, their prophetic force was not immediately evident to the Anglo-Saxons who witnessed them; for eleven years passed away after Egbert's coronation without intestine broils or foreign warfare.

The first military exploit which engaged Egbert's attention was a campaign against the Britons of Cornwall, or, as they were termed by the Saxons, the West-Welch, to distinguish them from the North-Welch, who inhabited the country now called Wales. His invasion of this district was so impetuous, that nothing could resist his progress, and he probably compelled the inhabitants of that rugged peninsula to be in future tributary to the kingdom of Wessexⁱ.

^g Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

^h Saxon Chron.

ⁱ Sax. Chron. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

A year or two after this campaign died the great Charlemagne^k, who had for many years attracted the attention, and made himself the focus, of all Western Europe. His ally, also, the spiritual head of his extensive empire, Leo III., died not long afterwards, leaving the Papal throne to Stephen IV., who, however, did not outlive the year of his consecration.

In the natural course of human things the disruption which befel the continent of Europe, after the death of Charlemagne, diverted the attention of the world from the point on which it had hitherto been fixed; other actors appeared upon the stage, and the drama of nations was found to be conducted according to the same rules as those by which the fortunes of individuals are regulated in private life.

The deceased emperor had chosen Offa, the contemporary king of Mercia, for his friend and correspondent: but a greater than Offa was now reigning in Wessex; whose fame, passing beyond the narrow limits of his native island, spread through the whole of Europe, and filled the void which had been occasioned by the death of Charlemagne. For if among nations, which have already attained a high degree of civilization, fortune is rarely found to smile for a long time together on the same people, this is still more forcible in the case of nations which have recently emerged into political life, and are not yet established on a firm and settled basis.

That Britain, separated from the rest of civilized Europe, should have at this time attracted the notice of the continental nations, might seem at first sight to require explanation. But the influence of the Church, continually increasing from the fifth to the twelfth

^k Charlemagne died Jan. 28, A.D. 814.

century, and grasping at every thing which seemed to confirm or maintain the false position which she had assumed, was readily lent to give importance to an island, which from its easy conversion by the agency of the Pope himself, seemed peculiarly to be an appanage of the Apostolic See. The readiness with which Ethelbert and his whole kingdom had submitted to the spiritual control of a terrified¹ body of monks, led the Popes of Rome for many hundred years to pride themselves on the strength which had accrued to the whole of Christianity by the exertions of their predecessor Gregory: they looked upon Britain as one of the brightest gems in their triple crown, and repeatedly in after-ages shewed an inordinate desire to rivet the chains which bound this distant insular province more closely to the capital of St. Peter's sovereignty. At a very early period we read of a school^m having been established at Rome, for the education of the young princes and nobles, who in those days flocked in large numbers out of Britain, to pay their vows at the "thresholds of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul." Large contributions were also levied in Britain for the benefit of the Eternal City and God's Vicegerent upon earth,—furnishing to our simple ancestors, if they could have been enlightened sufficiently to use their common sense, a conclusive argument against the pretensions of the foreigners, who preached so loudly of the glory of the Heavenly Kingdom, but in their own practice readily

¹ St. Augustine and his companions were more than once almost induced to abandon their mission to Britain, from alarm at the supposed dangers which they would have to encounter. See the history of their journey and mission in Venerable Bede.

^m This school was burnt down in the year 816. SAX. CH. FLOR.

exchanged all its most brilliant promises for that dross which is only of value in the kingdom of this world. But the low condition of the human intellect, which prevailed among the people of the Heptarchy, encouraged the Heads of the Roman Church to carry on a more wholesale system of extortion in Britain, it is believed, than in any other country of Europe. Neither can it be said that the Anglo-Saxons were unwilling victims, for during the two hundred years which passed immediately before the accession of Egbert, the whole history of the English nation is merged in the pilgrimages which were daily made by all classes to Rome, for the purchase of pictures, reliques, and rubbish, which the ecclesiastics exchanged for the more substantial payment of gold and silver tendered to them by the pilgrims^a.

Thus a perpetual stream of travellers kept up a connection between Rome, the centre of European civilization, and the country of the Anglo-Saxons; by which all the political questions that arose in this distant island became known to the Papal Court, and were spread by means of the ecclesiastics and men of letters, there assembled, through the whole of Europe. That the empire of Rome over England would be strengthened by the consolidation of the Heptarchy into one monarchy, and be maintained with less trouble to the reigning Pontiff, was a view likely to be entertained in that age of limited intercourse between nations, and we may easily conceive that, when Egbert at length set about his work of conquest in good

^a See Bede's Lives of the Abbats of Jarrow and Wearmouth: his letter to Egbert, and the whole mass of ecclesiastical legends of the seventh and eighth centuries.

earnest, there were many eyes directed upon his arms from abroad, and many bosoms that expanded with satisfaction, as they watched the rapidity of his conquests.

In 819 a revolution took place in Mercia, which still further smoothed for Egbert the path of ambition which he was to follow. Kenwolf, the king of that province, died this year, leaving the throne to his son Kenelm, a boy only seven years old. But the proverb which augurs evil to the country whose sovereign is a child, came true in the case of the hapless infant. The princess Quendreda, sister to Kenelm, inflamed with the desire to reign, concerted a plot against her brother's life, and within a few months after the death of the late king, the innocent youth was murdered by his tutor Ascebert in a wood, where he was walking to enjoy the coolness of the evening breezes. His lifeless body was found, we are told*, by the aid of a heavenly light, and buried at Winchelcombe near the body of his father: so remarkable an interposition of the Deity gave a hint to the piety of the Church, and the loss of temporal sovereignty was compensated to the murdered boy by a place in the calendar of the Romish Church, which is still adorned by the name and virtues of St. Kenelm. Keolwolf, who had perhaps been in some way privy to the death of the young king his nephew, succeeded to the throne: of which, however, he did not long maintain the possession: he was driven from his kingdom in 821^p and Bernwolf,

* Florence of Worcester alone relates this story: the Saxon Chronicle, Ethelwerd, and Henry of Huntingdon, place Keolwolf in immediate succession to Kenwolf. See also J. Brompton.

^p Saxon Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

whether by force of arms or the consent of the people, became king of Mercia in his stead¹.

After another interval of two years, the dissensions, which always existed between the various Saxon kingdoms, burst out into a general war, which covered the whole country. The kingdom of East-Anglia, inferior to Mercia, Wessex, and Northumberland, still maintained independence, and occasionally resisted in arms the aggressions of Mercia its natural enemy. At the beginning of the year 823, they apprehended an invasion of their country by Bernwolf, and so urgent was the case, that their king paid a hasty visit into Wessex, and solicited assistance from Egbert². Lest negotiation alone should be ineffectual, a large bribe of money was added, and the king of Wessex was prevailed on to promise his powerful aid against the Mercians. This treaty was no sooner made, than acted upon: the armies of Egbert and Bernwolf met at Ellandune, and after a severe battle, the Mercians were defeated and fled. Among those who fell on this occasion was the Duke of Somerset, probably one of the most influential of the nobles of Wessex³. His body was afterwards buried at Winchester.

About the same time that this engagement was fought on the borders of Mercia, the Britons of

¹ "Admitted to the throne," FLOR. "occupied the throne." HUNT. Ingulf however states plainly, that Kenwolf was expelled by Bernwolf, who possessed great riches, but was not connected with the royal family.

² SAX. CH. Ethel.

³ SAX. CH. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

⁴ Ingulf. Historia Croyland.

⁵ Ethelwerd.

⁶ Ingulf. Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

Cornwall rebelled, and assailed the West-Saxons in the rear: but the men of Devonshire mustered in large numbers and met the enemy at Camelford: a furious conflict ensued, apparently with little advantage to either party, for, whilst most of the Chroniclers omit to state on which side the victory fell, Florence alone tells us that the Britons were defeated, and Henry of Huntingdon says that many thousands were slain on both sides.

The king of Mercia, exasperated by his defeat at Ellandune, and burning with rage against the East Anglians, by whom the West Saxons had been brought into the field against him⁷, now invaded East Anglia, and commenced a war of extermination against its inhabitants. But the battle of Ellandune had given more than usual confidence to his enemies: the king of East Anglia mustered his forces, and boldly met the invaders. In the battle which followed, Bernwolf was slain, and the greater part of his army cut in pieces. In the course of the following year, A.D. 824, Ludecan, a relation of Bernwolf, took possession of the vacant Mercian throne.

The ambition of Egbert, now aroused to action, was in no want of a field on which to display itself. Of the three southern kingdoms, Kent, Sussex, and Essex, Kent alone seems to have maintained a show of independence, but the appearance of an army, headed by Prince Ethelwolf, Bishop Alstan, and Alderman Wolfherd, whom Egbert had dispatched to invade Kent,

⁷ It is proper to mention, that all the Chroniclers except Ingulf place the alliance between the kings of Wessex and East Anglia after the battle of Ellandune: but I have the authority of Dr. Lingard, besides the greater probability of the case, to support me in preferring Ingulf's statement to that of all the others.

terrified the people of that kingdom: their king Baldred fled beyond the Thames, and the whole of Kent submitted, without a battle, to the arms of the invaders. At the same instant, the kingdoms of Sussex and Essex resigned their separate independence, and thus the whole of England south of the Thames fell an easy acquisition to the abilities and good fortune of the conqueror.

But whilst the arms of Egbert in the south met with nothing that could resist their progress, the war in Mercia still continued. Ludecan, to avenge the death of Bernwolf, again invaded East Anglia, in the early part of 825, but the evil fortune of Mercia was still predominant: their army was again defeated, and Ludecan with five of his nobles were left dead upon the field*. By the event of this battle, the throne of Mercia was again vacant; but it was also thereby freed from the usurpers, who, by the violence with which they acquired and maintained their illegal sovereignty, had brought calamity upon all their people. By the universal consent of the Mercians, Wiglaf, a descendant of the ancient royal line, was called to the throne, but it was to a throne beset with difficulties and dangers. His dominions were exposed to be continually ravaged by the troops of Egbert, who now seemed bent on reducing the whole of Mercia to subjection. In 827, Wiglaf was driven from the throne, and pursued, like a beast of the chase, by the officers of the West-Saxon king. In this peril he was saved by the diligence of the faithful abbat Seward, and placed in the cell of Etheldrida, daughter of king Offa, and now a nun in a convent attached to Croyland abbey. This noble lady, whose name after death was inserted in the long

* SAX. CH. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

catalogue of Saints of the Church, supported for four months the fugitive monarch, and foiled all the endeavours of his enemies to obtain possession of his person. In the following year 828, Egbert's fury relented towards an enemy who could no longer be an impediment to his career. A circumstance also had happened at the end of the preceding year, which was of much influence in mollifying the mind of the conqueror. The Northumbrians, who seemed not yet to have recovered from the dissensions which ended in the expulsion of their king Ardolf, met the victorious armies of Egbert at Dore, and with their king Enfrid took the oath of allegiance. Thus, peace being reestablished, by the mediation of the good abbat, Wiglaf was invited from his hiding-place, to resume possession of his kingdom, which from that time he governed for ten years longer, as a tributary of the king of Wessex ^a.

Thus, in five years, the seven kingdoms of the Saxons were reduced to submission, and Egbert might now be styled Bretwalda of the Heptarchy, with more propriety perhaps than any of the seven who had before obtained that title. His authority was more clear and determined than that of his predecessors, for the course of events had made it impossible that so many petty sovereignties should any longer exist together within the limits of so small an island as Britain. The Saxons were also more enlightened and less barbarous than they had been during the first hundred and fifty years of their residence in this country. With the introduction of learning and the arts, petty states will be conscious of their own weakness, which they will seek to remedy by a confederacy, or by amalgamation into one nation. To these causes may be added another, no

^a Ingulf gives the fullest narrative of these events.

less powerful in producing an union of the seven states, whenever a king should arise possessing sufficient talents or good fortune to unite them. The Britons had of late lost much of their territory, and were no longer able, as of old, to promote and nourish strife between the different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. That portion of them, who dwelt in Wales, had gradually receded before the arms of Mercia, and the small remnant who occupied Cornwall, had ceased to be an enemy worthy to encounter the armies of Wessex.

The views of Egbert naturally expanded themselves, as fortune smiled upon his arms. His course, bounded in all other directions by the circumambient ocean, burst, like a pent-up stream, over the Welsh frontier, where alone it could now find a vent. Proceeding towards the West, after the submission of Northumberland, Egbert invaded Wales, and speedily reduced the inhabitants of that country to acknowledge his sovereignty^b. After this campaign was ended, the victorious king returned to his hereditary dominions, and four years passed away, apparently of peace and tranquillity to the whole of the island. From this repose, Egbert was summoned again to arms by the ravages of a foreign enemy, which had already, in the reign of Bertric, visited the English coast^c, but had

^b This is the statement of all the Chroniclers. I should think, however, that it is to be interpreted with considerable latitude; the difficulties which so mountainous a country would present, would hardly allow it to be reduced to more than nominal submission within the space of one year. Dr. Lingard says, that Egbert planted his victorious standard in the island of Anglesey, [England, vol. i. p. 144. of the small London edition,] but I find no authority for this in the ancient Chroniclers.

^c See p. 14.

not yet made themselves known by the career of blood and rapine on which they now entered.

In relating the deeds of these barbarians, who, even in the reign of the powerful Egbert, ventured to land and plunder on our island; the same narrative is again and again to be repeated, with little variation to amuse or interest the reader; still it is important to mark the progress which the marauders made, the checks which they from time to time experienced, and the audacity with which they advanced, step by step, from plunder to conquest, until they gained possession of the whole country, and set their own kings upon the English throne.

It is now admitted by historians, that the three nations of marauders, who, in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, overran all the north of Europe, and are commonly distinguished as Danes, Saxons, and Normans, were in a great measure the same people. It is, however, to be conceded, that the Saxons were probably a Teutonic tribe, who, as they migrated towards the northern coast, fell in with other marauding tribes of Scandinavian origin, with which they insensibly became blended, and uniting a portion of the Scandinavian with their original Teutonic character, spread desolation by their incursions over the whole of Europe bordering on the northern seas.

During the space of two hundred years, from 250 to 450, the Saxons had harassed the Britons, when they were under the dominion of the Romans; and though the acquisition of Britain furnished so great a relief to the population in their native haunts on the continent, that for 250 years they no longer molested the island which was then in the possession of their own countrymen, yet, at the end of that time, their

depredations recommenced: they ravaged and alternately conquered England, "they often invaded Scotland and Ireland, and made incursions on the coasts of Livonia, Courland, and Pomerania. Already feared, before the time of Charlemagne, they became still more terrible as soon as this great monarch's eyes were closed. He is known to have shed tears on hearing that these barbarians had, on some occasion, defied his name, and all the precautions he had made to oppose them. He foresaw what his people would suffer from their courage under his feeble successors. And never was presage better founded. They soon spread like a devouring flame over Lower Saxony, Friesland, Holland, Flanders, and the banks of the Rhine as far as Mentz. They penetrated into the heart of France, having long before ravaged the coasts; they every where found their way up the Somme, the Seine, the Loire, the Garonne, and the Rhone. Within the space of thirty years, they frequently pillaged and burnt Paris, Amiens, Orleans, Poitiers, Bourdeaux, Toulouse, Saintes, Angoulême, Nantes, and Tours. They settled themselves in Camargue, at the mouth of the Rhone, from whence they wasted Provence and Dauphiny as far as Valence. In short, they ruined France, levied immense tribute on its monarchs, burnt the palace of Charlemagne at Aix-la-Chapelle, and, in conclusion, caused one of the finest provinces in the kingdom [Normandy] to be ceded to them. They often carried their arms into Spain, and even made themselves dreaded in Italy and Greece. In fine, they no less infested the north than the south with their incursions, spreading every where desolation and terror: sometimes as furiously bent on their mutual destruction, as on the ruin of other

nations ; sometimes animated by a more pacific spirit, they transported colonies to unknown or uninhabited countries, as if they were willing to repair in one place the horrid destruction of human kind occasioned by their furious ravages in others.....

“ If we reflect on the interior state of Scandinavia during the times that its inhabitants were so unfortunately famous, we shall soon see the cause of that amazing exterior power which they possessed. They neglected agriculture, which, among a thousand other good effects, extinguishes in a rising people the relish for savage life, and inspires them with the love of peace and justice, without which the cultivation of their lands is useless. Their flocks being almost their only income, they were neither obliged to a constant abode on the same spot, nor to wait for the time of harvest, and consequently such a people, though in fact but few, were able, on short notice, to levy numerous armies. Most of them, brought up in a maritime country, and inured to the sea from their childhood, had no fear of the dangers, or rather knew not that there were dangers of any kind attending such a life. What a boundless field for conquests was here opened by the sole advantage of navigation ! What a free scope was here afforded a warlike people to spread universally the terror of their arms ! The profession of piracy was so far from appearing disgraceful to them, that it was in their eyes the certain road to honours and to fortune : for it was wisely contrived that the word honour, to which so many ideas are annexed, was among them solely confined to a disregard of dangers. Hence it is that in the ancient chronicles, more than one hero boasts of being the most renowned pirate in the north ; and that often

the sons of the great lords and kings made cruising voyages in their youth, in order to render themselves illustrious, and to become one day worthy of command.....

“As soon as a prince had attained his eighteenth or twentieth year, he commonly requested of his father a small fleet completely fitted out, in order to achieve with his followers some adventure that might be productive of glory and spoil. The father applauded such an inclination in his son, as indicating a rising courage and heroic mind. He gave him ships, the commander and crew of which mutually engaged not to return, unless adorned with laurels and loaded with plunder. That nation became the first object of their resentment from whom they had received any injury; and frequently their principal aim was to make reprisals on some province which served for the retreat of other corsairs. If the fleets of two different nations met by chance in their voyage, this was also an occasion of fighting which they never neglected.

“The vanquished party was commonly put to death, though sometimes the conquerors were contented to make them slaves, and often, by a singular strain of generosity, which the love of glory was able to produce in minds in other respects so ferocious, if the enemy that fell in their way had fewer ships than themselves, they set aside part of their own vessels, that so, engaging upon equal terms, the victory might not be attributed to superiority of numbers. Many of them also considered it as dishonourable to surprise the enemy by night. Sometimes the chiefs thought it best to decide the dispute by single combat; in this case they landed on the nearest shore: if one of them happened to be disarmed or thrown down, he frequently

refused to receive quarter, and was killed on the spot ; but if he had defended himself gallantly, the victor granted him his life, demanded his friendship, adopted him for a kind of foster-brother, and they mutually swore to preserve an eternal friendship. In token of this alliance the two heroes made incisions in their hands or arms, and besmeared their weapons with the blood, or mixing it in a cup, each of them covering their heads with a sod, drank of it, swearing that the death of the first of them who fell in battle should not pass unrevenged. Many of these piratical princes, whom success and custom had attached and habituated to this profession, never quitted it, but gloried in passing the remainder of their lives on board their ships. We meet with them sometimes, in their ancient histories, boasting that they never reposed under an immovable roof, nor drank beer in peace by their fire-side.

“ The vessels of these corsairs were always well-provided with offensive arms, such as stones, arrows, cables, with which they overset small vessels, and grappling irons to board them. Every individual was skilful in swimming, and as their engagements were seldom far distant from the shore, the vanquished party often saved themselves by swimming to land. Each band had its own peculiar stations, ports, places of rendezvous, and magazines : and many cities in the north owe their present prosperity to the advantage they had of affording them retreats. Such was Lunden in Scania, which, according to Adam of Bremen^d, contained great riches laid up there by the pirates : and for a long time the kings themselves countenanced and shared their plunder, by selling them the liberty of retiring into their har-

^d Adam Bremen, de sit. Dan. cap. ccxiii.

bours.....The manner in which the lands were parcelled out in Denmark and Norway evidently shews, that every thing there was directed towards this one end, of having a powerful maritime force. Each division, whether more or less considerable, derived its name from the number of vessels it was capable of fitting out, and these names still subsist in some places. In the history of Denmark may be seen the particular taxes imposed on each province for that purpose, and the number of ships of which their fleets were composed. At first they were inconsiderable, but in proportion as the chiefs who followed this piratical profession were enriched by it, the northern seas were seen covered with one or two hundred vessels, or still more numerous squadrons. We read in history of a fleet of seven hundred ships, commanded by Harald, surnamed Bluetooth, king of Denmark, and a Norwegian Earl named Hakon. This number is no greater than what we often find in the fleets under the following reigns, and besides it is certain that the vessels of which it consisted were but small. The first we hear of were only a kind of twelve-oared barks; they were afterwards built capable of containing a hundred or a hundred and twenty men, and these were very common in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The northern kings, also, sometimes constructed vessels of an extraordinary size, but these were rather for show than defence. Such was that of Harald Harfagra, a long ship, which the chronicles mention with admiration, under the name of the Dragon. King Olaf Tryggvason had one of the same kind, named the Long Serpent: the chronicles say it was very long, large, and high, and of a most durable construction; a serpent or dragon was

carved on its prow, and both that and its poop were gilded. It carried thirty-four banks of rowers, and was, they add, the finest and largest ship that had ever been in Norway.

“These piratical expeditions were not always confined to the devastation of some province, or to a few naval engagements; events which, producing no farther consequence than the immediate misfortune of the people who then suffered by them, were soon forgot by posterity. I should digress from my subject were I to relate all the conquests made by the inhabitants of the north in their cruising voyages. I will only take notice of the emigration of the Angles, who, along with the Saxons, invaded Britain in the fifth century, and gave it their name. As for the rest, I shall only borrow from the old chronicles some facts and relations little known to strangers, but which will afford the best idea of the maritime power of these ancient Northmen, formerly dreaded by so many nations.

“It is well known, that the Britons, unable to defend themselves from the northern inhabitants of their isle, sought for assistance from the Danes and Saxons, their allies*. The ancient Saxon Chronicle informs us, that those people who went over and settled in Britain were originally of three different countries. One party of them were the ancient Saxons, that is to

* By this observation it is not meant to be implied that the whole of the account, as it is generally given by the chronicles, concerning Hengist, Horsa, and Vortigern, is to be received for true. The details of the story are certainly legendary; but I have no doubt that the Britons requested assistance from the roving Danish and Saxon tribes against the equally fierce barbarians of Scotland, who overran their country.

say, the people of Lower Saxony; another were the Angles or English, who inhabited that part of the duchy of Sleswic in the neighbourhood of Flensbourg, still called Anglen, and were consequently Danes. Lastly, there passed over into Britain also a considerable number of Jutes, which is the name given at this day to the inhabitants of Jutland. From the Jutes, says the chronicler, came the Kentishmen and the Wightwarians, that is, the tribe which now dwells in Wight, and that race among the West-Saxons which is still called the race of Jutes. From the Old-Saxons came the men of Essex, and Sussex, and Wessex. From Anglia, which has ever since remained waste betwixt the Jutes and Saxons, came the men of East Anglia, Middle Anglia, Mercia, and all North-humbria*." The same writer says that the country, which the Angles originally occupied, was entirely emptied of its inhabitants by the conquest of Britain, and that it had ever since remained waste. Thus it appears that one of these three nations, at least the Jutes, came from Denmark, and that when the Danes, at the period of our narrative, again infested England, they waged war against their own kinsmen, the descendants of their own ancestors.

Such is a brief outline of the character and origin of those tribes which, in the thirtieth year of Egbert's reign, began to commit serious depredations on the coast of England. They had already landed on our shores during the reign of Bertric; those visits, however, had been transient, and occasioned no further alarm than might at any time be produced by the approach of a band of pirates. But from the period at which our narrative has arrived, these plunderers

* Mallet's Northern Antiquities, ch. ix.

commenced a series of aggressions on a large and formidable scale; year after year they renewed their invasions, and whilst the ferocity, with which they carried on their inroads, rendered them an object of just apprehension to the simple peasants, whose cattle they drove off to their ships, the faithlessness with which they broke through all the most sacred engagements, which from policy or necessity they contracted with the kings or nobles of the countries they were ravaging, spread terror among men of all classes, and rendered them unable to defend their lives, their property, or their country from the hands of these relentless plunderers.

But there was another element of animosity which contributed still more to inflame the contest between the northern pirates and their victims. At the time when these marauding fleets first appeared on the coasts of northern Europe, the Christian Religion had been long established, and its tendency in all cases was undoubtedly to soften the warlike passions of mankind, and to teach them, as brothers descended from the same stock, and sons of God by baptism, to exercise less cruelty in the contests which they carried on with one another. This circumstance no doubt produced an effect upon the military character of those people, and it is plain, from the history of the Anglo-Saxons, that the monastic institutions with all their accompaniments produced a sensible effect on the general spirit of the nation, and rendered them less warlike than their predecessors. But the Danes were still Pagans, and when they came to make inroads into the heart of England, France, or Belgium, the priests would draw their strongest arguments in encouraging their flocks to resistance from the unbelief of the

invaders. This naturally produced retaliation: the Danes slew with unrelenting fury those whom they looked upon as the leaders of the people, and the principal impediment in their course of plunder. If to this view we add the fact, that the Monasteries were made the depositary of the wealth of the adjoining district, from the supposed sanctity of the place, we cannot wonder that those establishments were sought out with avidity by the barbarians, and plundered without compunction. Their sanctity was no protection to them; on the contrary, it may have been an inducement to greater cruelties: for where has been found a nation that would be restrained, in the excitement which war produces, from treating with contempt all that their enemies hold sacred, but which to them appears as superstition, because it differs from the forms which are sanctioned by their own religious belief?

Nine years had passed since the defeat of the Mercians at Ellandune, when the heathen-men ravaged the isle of Sheppey[†], but we know nothing of their numbers, or of any other circumstances of their voyage. In the following year, 833, a fleet of thirty-five ships came to land at Carrum, supposed to be Charmouth in Dorsetshire: Egbert encountered them with such troops as he could muster, and a fierce battle ensued. After a great slaughter had been made on both sides, the English retreated, and the Danes remained masters of the field. In this engagement were slain two bishops and two aldermen on the side of the Anglo-Saxons[‡];

[†] Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

[‡] The two bishops were Wigthen and Hereferth, according to the Saxon Chronicle; Wigberth and Hereferth, according to Henry of—

and the Danes—for the chroniclers do not mention the ulterior results of the battle—probably retired with the plunder which they had gained. This defeat must have been galling to the mind of the West-Saxon king, who had never before been worsted, and it added to his indignation, that he himself, after a whole day's doubtful fighting, with difficulty escaped from the battle, aided by the darkness of the night^b. Two years afterwards he had an opportunity afforded him for retrieving his reputation: a large army of Danes landed, in 835, on the coast of Cornwall, and finding the people inclined to rebel against the dominion of the Saxons, a treaty was speedily made between them, and an united army of Danes and Britons was led into the territories of Wessex. Now, however, King Egbert was prepared to receive them: at the head of his army he encountered the enemy, though superior to him in numbers, at Hengstone Hill, and inflicted on their combined forces so serious a defeat, that the Britons dispersed to their mountains, and the Danes sought refuge in their shipsⁱ. Notwithstanding this defeat, the Northmen again made an attempt on England in the year 837 in two separate places, but with different success. One of their fleets, consisting of thirty-five ships, came to land near Southampton, where they were met by Alderman Wolfherd, and defeated with much slaughter^k. Meanwhile their other

Huntingdon. Whatever were their names, they probably were the bishops of Winchester and Salisbury, whose dioceses lay near the scene of the battle. The aldermen were named Dudda and Osmond. Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

^b Will. Malmesbury, Book II.

ⁱ Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

^k Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

division landed at Porchester in Dorsetshire, where they found Alderman Ethelhelm, at the head of the men of Dorset, waiting to receive them. This time, however, the star of the Anglo-Saxons was on the wane. After making great exertions during the whole day, which were partly successful, to obtain the victory, the Danes finally prevailed: the Alderman was slain, and his army defeated¹. This disaster was speedily followed by others; for in the ensuing year, "Alderman Herbert was slain by the heathen-men, and many with him among the Marsh-men; and afterwards, in the same year, in Lindsey, and in East Anglia, and in Kent, many men were slain by the enemy^m." Thus the good fortune of Egbert, which had borne him triumphant through so many battles, seemed at length to have deserted him; but he was mercifully spared by death from witnessing the calamities which were coming upon his country. He died at the end of 838, or the beginning of 839ⁿ, leaving his dominions to be divided between his sons Ethelwolf and Ethelstan, the former of whom inherited the paternal sovereignty of Wessex, whilst the latter received a tributary kingdom, consisting of the modern counties of Kent, Essex, Surrey, and Sussex^o.

¹ Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

^m Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

ⁿ The death of Egbert is placed in 835, by the Saxon Chronicle, Ethelwerd, Florence, and Huntingdon; but there are two charters bearing his signature dated in 838, which prove that he was then still alive. See Mr. Hardy's edition of William of Malmesbury, vol. i. p. 60, note ^a, where this subject is considered. See also *supra*, p. 15, note ^o.

^o The obscure language of the old chroniclers leaves it doubtful whether Ethelstan was the younger son of Egbert, or the son of Ethelwolf. In the latter case, there appears to be no valid reason,

why Ethelbald, Ethelbert, and Ethelred, sons of Ethelwolf, should have been passed over in the division of the kingdom, in favour of their youngest brother Ethelstan. Rapin, in his History of England, gives the two following notices of the family: the first from the unpublished chronicle of J. Beaver; the second from John of Tinnuth. "Redburg, his spouse, had never assumed the title and port of a queen, because of the law made in Wessex, on account of the death of Bertric. She is said to have persuaded the king to forbid the Welsh, on pain of death, to come beyond Offa's dike, the boundary of Mercia and Wales."

"Some say he [Egbert] had also a daughter called Edgith, who founded the abbey of Pollesworth, but this is uncertain."

CHAP. IV.

THE REIGN OF ETHELWOLF, FROM A.D. 839 TO 858.—HIS WARS WITH THE DANES AND WELSH—HIS SONS ETHELBALD, ETHELBERT, ETHELRED, AND ALFRED—HIS PIETY—JOURNEY TO ROME—REBELLION OF ETHELBALD—DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM—ETHELWOLF'S DEATH.

By the decease of Egbert, an arduous duty devolved upon the shoulders of his successor. Concerning the character of that successor, the opinions of historians have long been divided. The historian of Malmesbury has described him as an imbecile prince, more fit to be a priest than a king; but this view of his character is certainly not substantiated by any of the earlier chronicles. In the battles which he fought, year after year, against the Danish marauders, he displayed both courage and good generalship; and if he gave too much attention to the representations of the clergy to exempt him altogether from the charge of superstition, we must ascribe it to the temper of the age, which was grossly sunk in superstition, and would have rejected, as impious, a monarch who should treat with contempt the forms and ceremonies of religion. When to this we add, that the early education of Ethelwolf was confided to the charge of Swithin, bishop of Winchester^a, who also in conjunction with Alstan, bishop of Sherborne, were his principal advisers and ministers of state, it is not surprising that he should have displayed throughout his reign a steady attachment to those ceremonies of religion, which he had been

^a Malmesb. de Gestis Pontificum.

trained to reverence from his earliest years. It is generally admitted by historians, that Ethelwolf was educated in the monastic life at Winchester; but it has even been asserted by some, that he received holy orders, and was in due time promoted to the bishopric of the Church in which he had received his education. Malmesbury^b indeed says, that at the time of Egbert's death, his son Ethelwolf was a subdeacon, and was allowed to change the cloister for the throne, by a dispensation from Pope Leo the Third, because there was no other heir to the throne. In refutation of this story it is sufficient to observe, that Pope Leo the Third had been dead twenty years; that Ethelstan, the brother of Ethelwolf, was as well qualified to rule Wessex as Kent; and, as Dr. Lingard has justly observed, the historian Malmesbury, who has given this story in his *Lives of the Bishops*, has made no allusion to it in his general work on the *History of the English Kings*. We have also seen, that several years before his father's death, the young prince had been chosen to command an army by which Kent, Sussex, and Essex, were successfully invaded, and reduced to permanent subjection: we shall also perceive, as our narrative advances, that the son of Egbert, in the wars which followed, conducted himself like a brave prince, and deserved—if merit could command success—to rescue his country from the calamities which were coming thick upon her.

^b Ibid. "The tale of Ethelwolf having been bishop of Winchester is still less entitled to credit. Both reports probably arose from confounding together different persons with the same or similar names. Thus in the ancient life of St. Neot, [*Acta SS. Bened. Sæc. iv. tom. ii. p. 325.*] the bishop of Winchester his contemporary, and Ethelwold, who was bishop a century afterwards, are both described as the same person." *Lingard*, i. p. 148.

Before the first year of Ethelwolf's reign had expired, the Danes again assailed, on more points than one, the unfortunate Anglo-Saxons. The sufferings which the terrible invaders brought with them are briefly related by the chroniclers. "This year," says the Saxon Chronicle, "there was great slaughter made by the Danes at London, Canterbury*, and Rochester."

In the following year, namely 840, the king himself experienced a severe defeat at the hands of the invaders. A fleet of thirty ships came to land at Charmouth in Dorsetshire: and, as each vessel was more than usually crowded with men, the army that issued forth to ravage the country was more formidable than Ethelwolf had expected. He was unable to withstand their fury, and, as none of the chroniclers relate the events which ensued after the battle, we are left to suppose that the king retreated, and the Danes pursued their usual course of pillage without molestation over the adjoining districts^d.

Notwithstanding this defeat, it would seem that the resistance which the people made to their fierce plunderers was not unattended with advantage; for during the space of five years after the battle of Charmouth, the country enjoyed repose from the ravages of the Danes. At the end of that time, one of their fleets came to land at the mouth of the Parrot in Somersetshire. Here, however, they were disappointed in their hopes of plunder. Alderman Enwolf, at the head of the men of Somersetshire, with Bishop Alstan, and Alderman Osric at the head of the troops of Dorset,

* Nearly all the Mss. of the Saxon Chronicle have Quantavic for Canterbury in this place, but this is evidently an error of the scribe. One Ms. and Henry of Huntingdon have the correct reading.

^d Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

bravely met the invaders, and after a fierce battle, defeated them with great slaughter, and struck such terror into their roving bodies, that for six more years none of them ventured to land upon the English coast^e.

In 851, this peace was broken by the simultaneous appearance of four Danish fleets: but by the favour of fortune or the valour of the English, the ruin which seemed to threaten the whole country was again averted, and the invaders defeated more signally than before. The first engagement was fought at Wenbury, by Ceorl, the Alderman of Devonshire, and ended in the triumph of the English^f. A second party of the enemy landed on the eastern coast, where they for the first time passed the winter^g. In the mean time a third invading force, or a detachment from the army which wintered in the island—for the language of the Saxon Chronicle is rather obscure in this place—approached the southern coast of Kent. Here they were met by Ethelstan, the king of that province, attended by Alderman Alchere. Not waiting for the landing of the heathen forces, the English embarked on board their ships, and advanced to meet the invaders: a furious battle took place, the enemy were defeated, and with the loss of nine ships retreated from the island^h.

The fourth army of Danes which invaded England

^e Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

^f Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

^g The Saxon Chronicle, Ethelwerd and Huntingdon fix their wintering-place in the isle of Thanet; Florence and Simeon in the isle of Sheppey. Some Mss. of Henry of Huntingdon omit the name of the place altogether.

^h Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

in the year 851, was much more formidable in numbers than either of the other three. It was also more signally discomfited: not, however, without having first committed extensive ravages and inflicted severe losses on the inhabitants. Their fleet, consisting of three hundred and fifty ships, entering the mouth of the Thames, landed a large body of men, who sacked the cities of Canterbury and London; Berthwolf, king of Mercia, marching to oppose them, was defeated, and, if not slain by the enemy, he lost his throne in consequence of the battle, and was succeeded by Burrhedⁱ. The Danish army then crossed the Thames, and marched into the county of Surrey, until they reached Ockley. Here the West-Saxon monarch, with his eldest son Ethelbald, had assembled all his army: and the two nations met in a fierce and protracted engagement. Fortune again smiled on the bravery of the English: the Danes were defeated, with the slaughter of more than half their army; and the Chroniclers, who have recorded the victory at Ockley, agree in describing it as more disastrous to the enemy than any which they ever received in England, either before or since^k. "You might see their men of war," says Henry of Huntingdon, "falling on all sides like corn before the blade of the reapers; streams of blood flowed around, with the heads and limbs of the victims rolling in its swelling tide. If I were to describe each particular of the battle, I should weary the reader with my prolixity. Suffice

ⁱ Hunt.

^k This observation which has been copied by the other writers from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, seems to indicate, that this portion of that work was written before the victories of King Alfred, which certainly were quite as bloody and decisive as the battle of Ockley.

it to say, that God granted the victory to those who believed in Him, and reduced the enemy who despised his Name to humiliation that cannot be described!" Notwithstanding this terrible defeat, the Danes were not deterred from pursuing their usual course of piracy. In 853, two years after the battle of Ockley, Alderman Alcher with the men of Kent, and Alderman Huda with the men of Surrey, fought a severe battle against the Danes in the isle of Thanet: at first they were victorious, but in the end they were both slain or drowned, and a large number of men fell on both sides: the issue of the battle was apparently doubtful¹.

Two years after this we read of the heathen men again passing the winter in the isle of Sheppey^m, but with these exceptions the rest of Ethelwolf's reign was not again disturbed by the invading Danes, and his only military achievement was to assist Burrhed, king of Mercia, in reducing the North Welsh to submission. At the conclusion of this campaign, which was brought to a successful issue, the West Saxon monarch gave his daughter Ethelswitha in marriage to king Burrhed, and the wedding was celebrated with royal magnificence at the town of Chippenham, which had long been famous as a residence of the kings of Wessexⁿ.

From the account of wars and bloodshed, we turn with satisfaction to the more peaceful events which mark the reign of Ethelwolf. The name of his queen was Osburga, she was a noble and pious lady, descended from the ancient race of the Goths and Jutes. Her father was Oslac, the butler or cup-bearer of king Ethelwolf. His lineage was derived through the

¹ Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

^m Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

ⁿ Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

Earls Stuph and Withgar, nephews of Cerdic the first king of Sussex, and cousins to Kenric, Cerdic's son. When their uncle first landed in Britain, he gave to his brave nephews the Isle of Wight for an inheritance: but the Britons, by whom it was inhabited, would not be dispossessed of their country without fighting. They met their invaders at Carisbrooke, and were nearly all slaughtered. The survivors either fled from the island, or were afterwards slain in detail by the victorious Saxons^o. By his queen Osburga, Ethelwolf had four sons, Ethelbald, Ethelbert, Ethelred, and ALFRED, and one daughter Ethelswitha. The education and early life of these princes have been passed over by the Chroniclers, except a few particulars which will hereafter be noticed concerning their youngest child Alfred, and the affectionate tenderness which existed between him and his mother Osburga. From this omission of the contemporary writers we have lost much valuable information on the subject of Ethelwolf's private family and domestic arrangements. Sufficient has been left us to shew, that the royal family at this time were a family of love: but the writers of these times, as an old author^p has well remarked, though they lived at the same time with Alfred or in the age immediately succeeding, and may therefore be presumed to have known many passages of his domestic history, yet, as if they feared posterity would be less disposed to value king Alfred's achievements than to obtain a true account of them, have rather chosen to use their declamatory powers in his praise, than to give us a full narrative of his actions: they have extolled his wisdom and his courage; they have

^o Asser in *Vita Alfredi*, A.D. 859.

^p Spelman, *Life of Alfred the Great*, p. 14.

lauded to the skies his consummate generalship and the victories which he obtained, whilst in the mean time they have neglected to describe many particulars of his life, and especially of his early life; neither have they given us a very exact account of the manner in which he got through his greatest dangers, or even of the dangers themselves through which he passed; though these details would not only have excited and gratified the reader's thirst for knowledge, but would have raised their hero to the same height of reputation, and have placed upon a broader and surer basis the honours which posterity have awarded him.

The young ALFRED was born at Wantage in Berkshire, in 849, two years before that prosperous year, in which four Danish invasions were checked or repulsed by the victorious troops of his father^a. In 853, about the same time that Ethelwolf aided Burrhed, king of Mercia to invade the territory of the North Welch, Alfred, being in the fifth year of his age, was sent by his father, with a large retinue of nobles and commoners, on a pilgrimage to Rome. Expeditions of this kind had been frequent among the Saxons, even in the time of Venerable Bede, and they continued to be made almost down to the Norman Conquest, and there is little doubt that they exhausted the wealth, lowered the manly courage, and enervated the whole character of the Anglo-Saxon people.

King Ethelwolf was not exempt from the superstition, in which not only his own subjects, but all Europe, at this time were sunk. To account for the apparent preference shewn his fourth son Alfred, by selecting him, in disparagement of his three elder

^a Asser. Flor. Sim.

brothers, for the pilgrimage to Rome, it has been observed, that he displayed from his infancy not only a sweetness of countenance above the others, but also an excellence of spirit, of wit, and of disposition.

It has also been supposed that Ethelwolf intended at his death to bestow a tributary kingdom on his favourite son, and with this view sent him to receive the benediction of the Sovereign Pontiff*. Whatever

* Spelman. It is quite useless to conjecture what may have been the motives of actions, when we have so very imperfect accounts of the actions themselves. It could hardly be believed, in the present day, that so able a writer as Spelman should have indulged in so many reveries on this subject. "I find," says he, "in the Apology for Oxford, lib. ii. §. 197, (for the MS. itself I have not seen,) that an uncertain author in his marginal notes upon Ranulph Higden affirms, that Æthelwolf had such direction from an angel in a dream, in these words: "Atulphe rex dilecte Dei, quid moraris? mitte filium tuum post-genitum ad Romanum Pontificem, ut ab ipso inungatur in regem Anglorum, et sic ab ipso procedat unctio regalis ad cæteros reges ipsius regni in perpetuum duratura. Omnipotens Dominus filium tuum elegit in principem super Anglos, quia regnum Angliæ est regnum Dei in illo, et dic Swithuno quod ipse vadat cum filio tuo ad Romanum pontificem quod ipse homo justus est in conspectu Domini."

In allusion to the same subject, I find in the same volume, [Spelman's Life of Alfred, page 17.] the following note: "Mr. Tyrrell, [Gen. Hist. of Eng. vol. i. l. v. p. 262.] is of opinion, that he, [i. e. Alfred,] was not anointed king of any present dominions, which he also thinks plain from an old MS. in the Cottonian Library, which says he was anointed *in successorem paterni regni*. But since the Welch Annals, published by Percy Enderbie in the year MDCLXI, affirm [see lib. i. page 216,] that King Æthelwolf subdued a great part of Wales; and since Huntingdon [Hist. lib. v. p. 348. Ed. Franc. MDCI.] asserts, that this happened the very year wherein Ælfred was sent to Rome, I believe he was anointed king of South Wales; which seems also plain from the Saxon Chronicle, which mentions this conquest of the Welch. Now, though it be commonly reckoned that Ælfred was the first anointed king of England, and

may have been the motives of his father, the young lad was sent on this distant journey to Rome, where Leo the Fourth was at that time pope. The Holy Pontiff honourably received the young prince, anointed him king, as all the Chronicles express it, and bestowing on him the rite of confirmation*, adopted him as his own

therefore Robert of Gloucester thus expresses [fol. 73. b.] his journey and inunction at Rome:

“Alfrede this good man, in the year of grace nome
Eight hundred and sixty, and twelve the kingdome
Arst he had at Rome be, and for his great wisdome
The Pope Leon him blessed: when he thither come
And the king's crown of this land; that in this land yit is
Set him on and oiled him, or he king were I wis
And he was king of Engeland, of all that there come
That ever first anoiled was, of the pope of Rome
And sithe other after him, of the archbishop echone
So that before him, king anoiled was there none.”

[agreeably to which it is said in a certain MS. in the Bodleian Library, (Laud. C. 22.) *Iste Alfredus fuit primus rex Angliæ, qui regiam unctionem accepit*, (for *unctionem accepit* in another MS. of Archbishop Laud's, f. 10, b. it is *coronatus erat*) *Romæ a Leone IV.*] I say, though this be the common opinion, yet there is mention in some authors of kings being anointed before. For Gildas, [de excidio Brit. c. xix.] speaking of the errors in religion and of the wickedness of the old Britons, hath this passage of the British kings of that age: *ungebantur reges et non per Deum, sed qui cæteris crudeliores exstarent: et paullo post ab unctoribus non pro veri examinatione trucidabantur, aliis electis trucioribus.* He flourished above mc years since, and therefore could not [Selden's Titles of Honour, part i. c. viii. p. 149. ed. Lond. mdcxxxI.] deceive us herein by using the phrase of a later time, as perhaps it may be thought the Monk of Malmesbury doth in his relation of King Egfert, son and successor of King Offa in the kingdom of Mercia, about the year dccxc. *Dulci*, saith he, [de gestis Reg. Angl. lib. i. c. iv.] *tamen vitam consumpsit otio, et Egfertum filium ante mortem suam in regem inunctum successorem dimisit.*”

* “The ceremony of Confirmation [Ham. L'Estrange's Alliance

spiritual son. After which the young Alfred received the pope's blessing, and returned to his native land.

Like some of his predecessors on the throne of Wessex, king Ethelwolf had now imbibed a spirit of devotion to the Church: though the scanty notices which have reached us, concerning the mode in which the king shewed his piety, have given rise to controversies which will probably never be decided.

It is agreed by the consent of the Chroniclers and the royal Charters still existing, that between the end of 853, when Alfred was but recently returned from Rome, and the latter part of the year 855, his father Ethelwolf, with the advice and consent of his clergy and nobles, "gave by charter the tenth part of his land throughout his realm for the glory of God and his own eternal salvation¹." It has been considered by some writers, that in this grant is to be found the first origin of tithes in England; but it has been objected to

of Divine Offices, p. 262.] was considered by the Apostles and succeeding Fathers, as the compleatory and close of Baptism, not that Baptism was ineffectual without it, but an assistant to it; and therefore in persons adult, it immediately succeeded the very act of baptizing and dipping. In others it did not follow till they came to years of discretion; which being later in some than others, there was no set number of years: which is exactly agreeable to the rule of our Church. But whether this was observed in the time of king Alfred, is very uncertain, the Romanists having in this as well as other matters very much altered the most ancient custom; insomuch that about 400 years since we find that in England [Comber's Companion to the Temple, part iii. p. 220. ed. 1684.] children were usually confirmed at five years of age: and Aquinas informs us [Sum. 3. quæst. 72. Artic. 9.] that in the Roman Church, infants were confirmed very soon after baptism, upon persuasion, that they were not perfect Christians without it." *SPELM.* p. 20. From the words of the Saxon Chronicle, it would appear that Alfred, being still at Rome, was not consecrated king, until his father Ethelwolf was dead.

¹ Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

this, that tithes certainly existed in England before the reign of Ethelwolf, and the recent publication of the Anglo-Saxon Charters proves that the grant, which that monarch now made, was not one decided act, but rather a series of grants, each amplifying or confirming the preceding, and in perfect harmony with the character of an aged monarch, who hopes to provide for the salvation of his soul by continued benefactions to the Church".

* In the *Codex diplomaticus Anglo-Saxonicus*, 8vo. Lond. 1840. vol. ii. p. 50—58. are four charters of king Ethelwolf, on the subject of his donation to the Church : two of them are dated Ap. 22, 854 ; the third, Nov. 5, 855 ; and the fourth also in 855, but with no mention of the day or the month. The third of these charters seems to be the principal, and is also the same as is quoted by Ingulph and others. I therefore subjoin the text of it complete : "*REGNANTE DOMINO NOSTRO IN PERPETUUM. Dum in nostris temporibus bellorum incendia et direptiones opum nostrarum, necnon et vastantium crudelissimas hostium deprædationes barbarorum, paganarumque nationum multiplices tribulationes, ad affligendum nos pro peccatis nostris usque ad internecionem, tempora cernimus incumbere periculosa ; Quamobrem ego Ethelwulfus, rex West-Saxonum, cum consilio episcoporum ac principum meorum, consilium salubre ac uniforme remedium affirmantes, consensimus, ut aliquam portionem terrarum hæreditariam, antea possidentibus omnibus gradibus, sive famulis et famulabus Dei, Deo servientibus, sive laicis miseris, semper decimam mansionem ubi minimum sit, tum decimam partem omnium bonorum, in libertatem perpetuam donari sanctæ ecclesiæ dijudicare, ut sit tuta et munita ab omnibus secularibus servitutibus, imo regalibus tributis, majoribus et minoribus, sive taxationibus quæ nos dicimus Winterden [*Witereden* ;] sitque libera omnium rerum, pro remissione animarum et peccatorum nostrorum, ad serviendum Deo soli, sine expeditione, et pontis extructione, et arcis munitione ; ut eo diligentius pro nobis ad Deum sine cessatione preces fundant, quo eorum servitutem in aliqua parte levigamus. ACTA sunt hæc apud Wintoniam in ecclesia sancti Petri, anno Dominicæ incarnationis 855, indictione 3, nonis Novembris, ante majus altare, pro honore gloriosæ Virginis et Dei genitricis Mariæ, sanctique Michaelis archangeli, et beati Petri Apo-*

Of the origin of tithes so much has been said by previous writers, that it may be thought presumptuous

stolorum principis, necnon et beati patris nostri Gregorii papæ : PRÆSENTIBUS et subscribentibus archiepiscopis et episcopis Angliæ universis, necnon Beorredo, rege Merciæ, et Edmundo, Estanglorum rege: abbatum et abbatissarum, ducum, comitum, procerumque totius terræ, aliorumque fidelium infinita multitudine, qui omnes regium chirographum laudaverunt; dignitates vero sua nomina subscripserunt."

It is difficult to form a very exact notion of the meaning of this charter: Mr. Selden, in his *History of Tithes*, [p. 206.] conjectures that "the purpose of the charter was to make a general grant of tithes payable freely; because it seems before, that [p. 207.] the payment of all tithes had commonly been omitted. Which, as it is against the concurrent testimony of the greatest part of our ancient writers, so is it contrary to the very words of the statute, and the following reasons, [Rich. Tillesley's *Animadversions upon Mr. Selden's History of Tithes*, Lond. 1621, p. 186.] which evidently shew that this grant was of the tenth part of lands, not of tithes properly. For,

1. Ethelwolf could not give that first which had been given before by Ethelbert, upon the preaching of Augustine the Monk, [see the laws of Edward the Confessor,] Offa, king of Mercia, [see Selden, *ibid.* page 201.] and Elfwold, king of Northumberland, [*ibid.* p. 200.]

2. Whereas those kings gave tithes properly, and that not only in themselves, but also in their subjects, and so should give more than Ethelwolf, who gave but this *Decima* of his own land of inheritance, as appears from his passing it *per regium chirographum*, (his royal charter only, not any act of Parliament,) from Ethelwerd's *de omni possessione sua*, the word *hereditariam* in the charter, his Testament in Florence of Worcester, &c. yet Ethelwolf is extolled by king Edgar [in his speech to the clergy in Ailredo Rievallensi *de Genealogia regum Anglorum*, p. 359. apud *Decem Scriptores*] and William of Malmesbury, [*de Gestis Pontificum Angliæ*, p. 242.] as doing something extraordinary, and therefore this must be more than tithes.

3. There was no need for Ethelwolf to have asked the consent of his bishops and nobles, to give tithes out of his own lands, though it might seem requisite to ask consent to convey so much land.

to hope that any fresh information can be obtained. I will however observe, because I do not remember to have before seen the observation, that the *decimal* proportion of tithes to the whole property, of which they formed a part, arose perhaps originally from the obvious and acknowledged utility of the decimal system, which in all civilized nations has been adopted in almost all subjects of calculation. When Christianity was first introduced into Europe, tithes were certainly unknown; but in the time of Ethelbert, king of Kent, they already formed a part of the Christian system, though Selden contends that they were not introduced into England till the end of the eighth century. About the year 795, Offa, king of the Mercians, gave to the Church tithes of all his kingdom to expiate the death of Ethelbert, king of the East Angles, whom in the preceding year he had caused to be murdered.

The grant of Ethelwolf therefore cannot be con-

4. Ethelwolf gave such a Decima as was liable not only to taxes and exactions of state then, but also to that *trinoda necessitas* of *Pontis exstructio, expeditio, and arcis munitio*: to which service lands only, and not annual profits, were liable.

5. If Ethelwolf gave [Selden, p. 207.] the tithes of prædial and mixed profits, and the tithe of every man's personal possessions were at that time also included in the gift; then how could there be any newly-consecrated tithes after? (as he endeavours to prove from chartularies in the 11th chapter,) since all were now given by a charter in Parliament, nay by Parliamentary authority, as he calleth it.

6. If monasteries and nunneries (for so the charter and Edgar's speech do express) did not at that time enjoy any tithes, (as his history tells us they did not,) then nothing can be more certain than that king Ethelwolf did not give them: and therefore our author had good reason to say, that he gave the tenth of all his kingdom unto the Church, &c." SPELM. LIFE OF ALF. p. 21.

sidered as an original gift, but as confirmatory of preceding grants, though it probably surpassed all of them in extent, and served in no slight degree to confer upon the Church that inordinate wealth which in a later age she possessed.

But the pious king of Wessex, finding that his dominions were no longer assailed by the barbarians who had so long harassed them, was now smitten with the general desire of paying a visit in person to the city of Rome. In the prosecution of this wish, he assembled a numerous retinue, and taking with him his youngest and favourite son Alfred, who now made the journey for the second time, he set out for the Imperial city. On arriving at the place of his destination, he was honourably received by the Pope, who, no doubt, looked on him with especial favour in consequence of his late donation to the Church. We could have wished that the Chroniclers had given us some insight into the customs and modes of life which at this time prevailed, and particularly of the occupations in which the Court of Rome were engaged. It would be interesting to know how Ethelwolf could have amused himself, or occupied his time during the long sojourn which he made in that city. Neither would it be without profit to learn the state of our own country, which could allow its sovereign to absent himself so long from the government. On these points, however, the contemporary chronicles are silent: what they have told us concerning this journey does little credit to the discretion of Ethelwolf, if we consider the advanced age to which he must then have arrived. As soon as the period of his stay^{*} was

* Ethelwolf must have been in England on Nov. 5, 855, the date of his charter to the Church, and he was married to Judith on

expired, the king, having no doubt gratified his curiosity, and refreshed his devotion by a sight of the relics and sacred things which the city of Rome contained, set out upon his return to England. Passing through France, he paid a visit to the court of the French king, Charles the Bald, and there was captivated with the youthful graces of the princess Judith, who could hardly at that time have been more than thirteen years old¹. Though queen Osburga was probably still alive, for the Chroniclers have, singularly and unfortunately, been silent on the subject, the old king was not deterred from gratifying his inclinations: he married the young princess, and brought her to England as his queen².

But the state, whose sovereign has been so long absent, will probably be, if not in open rebellion, at least in a disaffected state, and ripe for insurrection. Such was now the state of England. We are ignorant of the manner in which the government was administered during the absence of Ethelwolf; it is most probable that it was confided to the charge of Ethelbald, the king's eldest son. If so, the trust which the king placed in this prince, nearly lost him the crown. Ethelbald was a warlike prince, very acceptable to the people, and may have been already anxious to possess some share in the government of his father's dominions, as had been before enjoyed by Ethelstane, now dead, his uncle, or as some say his elder brother. A specious excuse for

the 1st of October, 856, [Bouquet, vii. 72.] as he was returning through France. His stay therefore at Rome must have been about nine or ten months.

¹ Her mother Ermengarde was married to Charles the Bald on the 12th of December, 842, and Judith was their eldest daughter.

² Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

rebellion seemed now to present itself. The king had been an unreasonably long time absent, and by his marriage with the princess Judith, seemed to have alienated his affections from his former family. To this was added the offence which the nobles of Wessex took at the queenly honours conferred upon the king's new wife. Since the time of Edburga^a, the kings of Wessex, in deference to the public indignation which the crimes of that princess called forth, had never conferred on their wives the appellation of queen, or in any way allowed them to participate with themselves in the honours of sovereignty^b. When therefore they heard

^a See page 14.

^b "Ethelwolf broke this custom, and the law against the king's wife did not continue long in force; yet in the times of some of his successors there was often a respect had unto it. For in some memoirs of the reign of king Edgar, the queen is styled only his wife, or *legitima regis conjux* or *Cynninges gemæcca*, that is, the king's wife, and not queen. In the subscriptions of king Edgar's charter of privileges to Hyde Abbey, by Winchester, yet remaining in Sir Robert Cotton's Library, [sub effigie Vespasiani A, viii. See the learned Dr. Smith's Catalogue thereof, p. 106.] and written in letters of gold in a hand of the same age, his wife Elfrith subscribes thus: + EGO ELFRITH, . . . *legitima regis conjux*, &c. and also + EGO EDGIFA, *prædicti regis ava*, &c. and there are others of that nature of the same time, as will appear by consulting the Monasticon. This Elfrith is the same that our historians commonly call Elfrida or Elfrida, daughter to Orgar, then Earl or Duke (for those titles were not then distinguished) of Cornwall. And Edgifa was the third and last wife of king Edward, son to king Alfred, and grandfather to Edgar; yet perhaps by reason of this severe law she durst not style herself otherwise than the king's grandmother; for so *Ava* as well as *Avia* in those times denoted. In the same library is also extant a reformation of the monastic life of both sexes, entitled *Regularis concordia Anglicæ nationis monachorum sanctimonialiumque*, [Dr. Smith, who tells us 'tis a very fair MS, gives us another title, in his catalogue, p. 151, sub *Faustina*, B. iii.] and written in Edgar's time, wherein he takes care of the

that king Ethelwolf, still at the court of the French king, had crowned his bride, and placed her by his

monks, and his wife of the nuns, that is, *his gemæcean Ælfthrithe* or *his wife Ælfthrið*. And perhaps hence it was, that the wives of great dukes or earls of that time in the West-Saxon kingdom, which after Egbert quickly swallowed up the rest, subscribed by the name also of *conjux*, and not by any name of dignity, as if they would abstain from receiving any communication of title from their lords, as well as the king's wives did from the kings. For, anno 880, when Ethelred or Ethered, duke or earl of Mercia under king Alfred, by his charters [Regist. vetustiss. eccles. Wigorn. fol. 7, 29, 31, 211, &c. in Bibl. Cotton.] gave lands to the Church of Worcester, he subscribed by the name of *dux* and *patricius*; but his wife, being otherwise a princess and daughter to king Alfred, expresses herself in them only thus: + *Ego Æthelfled conjux subscribens confirmavi*: and in other charters, + *Ego Æthelfled consensi*. Yet they are both together styled, *Æthred Aldorman and Æthelfled Mercna hlafordas*; that is, *Æthred the alderman or duke, and Æthelfled the lords of Mercia*, in an instrument of Werfrid, bishop of Worcester, in the year 904, made to the same Church. However, notwithstanding, in expressing the title of the king's wife, such respect were sometime after Æthelwolf had to that old law; yet it also appears, that under the same king Edgar, the wife was likewise sometimes styled *queen* or *regina*: which shews that the use of *regina*, or *legitima conjux*, without the addition of *regina*, was grown by this time promiscuous in the West-Saxonum kingdom. For the same queen in a charter to the Church of Worcester subscribes [in Pat. I. ed. iv. part 6, memb. 23.] + *Ego Elfyred, or Alfthrið*, (as in the *Monasticon*, vol. i. p. 141.) *REGINA consensi et signo crucis confirmavi*, which was in 864; and in another to the Church of Ely occurs *Alfthrið regina*. [Cart. antiq. in arce Lond. B. num. 11.] In other kingdoms of the Heptarchy of that age, the title of *regina* was still given to the king's wives. + *Ego Ælfthrið regina* is subscribed with Kenwolf king of Mercia in the subscriptions [Regist. Wigor. MS. in Bibl. Cott. and Monast. Angl. tom. i. p. 122, &c.] of his charters to the Church of Worcester, and + *Sæthrið*, or *Sethryth, regina*, often subscribes with king Bertwolf to the same Church. So + *Ego Cynethryth Dei gratia regina Merciorum*, in some other, with king Offa. And among the coins of that age in Sir Rob. Cotton's library, [see the excellent dissertation upon the Saxon coins, written and published by the very curious and learned

own side on the throne^c, they construed it into a contempt for their own customs and sentiments. Prince

Sir Andrew Fountaine, at the end of Dr. Hickes's *Thesaurus Linguarum Septentrionalium*, tab. 3.] is one subscribed with *Cynethryth*, (not *Cenethryd*, as Mr. Selden reads it,) *regin.* and with *Eoba*, (not *Eopa*, with Selden,) on the other side. And Æthelswith, daughter to king Æthelwolf, frequently subscribes *Æthelswith regina* with Burghred king of Mercia, or Mercland, in the old register of Worcester. And at her marriage, saith Matt. Westm. [sub anno 852.] *reginæ nomen promeruit*. There is also a singular example of her in the chartulary of the abbey [Bibl. Cott. fol. 4. and in col. Æd. Christi, Oxon.] of Abingdon, where she alone by charter gives to one Cuthwolf her servant lands in Lacinge, in these words, + *Ego Æthelswith regina, Deo largiente, Merciorum cum consensu meorum seniorum concedens donabo Cuthwolfo, &c.* which is very properly used by some [Sir Ed. Coke in præfat. ad lib. iv.] to shew, that the law of England then was, that the queen in this island might, as at this day, give or contract as a *femme sole*. After king Edgar, it seems, the law of the West-Saxons also utterly vanished, and the wives of the Saxon kings were always styled *queens*, or *reginæ*. In an instrument [Regist. Wigorn. ecclesiæ vetust. fol. 166. MS. in Bibl. Cotton] that testifies how Agelwin, dean of Worcester, (*decanus Wigorniensis ecclesiæ*, so is his title of that time, but a prior and convent then supplied what now the dean and chapter do,) and his brother Ordric gave three cassats of land in Cundicotam to the monks there, Edward the Confessor, *ad confirmationem sermonum istorum*, subscribes, and then his queen Edgith thus; + *Ego Edgith regina consentio*. So in a charter of king Cnout to the abbey [Cart. 4 Ed. III. num. 58.] of St. Edmondsbury, his wife Alfgifa calls herself *Ego Alfgifa* (or *Elfgiva*, as in Monast. Angl. tom. i. p. 287.) *regina*, and in a Saxon charter of his to the same Church, he styles her [see *Mon. Anglic.* vol. i. p. 288.] *myne queen Alfgif*, and *regina mea Alfgifa* in the Latin of it, where he speaks of her giving to the Church a revenue of 4000 eels in Lakinghith. It appears also clearly, that the Saxon queens were always, in the latter times of that kingdom, crowned, anointed, and set with the kings in their seats of state, as other queens, and so that law or custom which proceeded from Queen Edburg was soon abrogated." Spelm. *Life of Alf.* p. 24.

^c Asser (and Florence who has copied Asser) tells us, that Ethelwolf made his wife Judith sit on the throne beside him, after he returned to England, and that she did so to the day of his death.

Ethelbald, to suit his own purposes, fanned the flame of sedition, and drew over to his own party Alstan, Bishop of Salisbury, and Enwolf, Alderman of Somersetshire, with whom he now began to concert plans, how they might keep his father, as imbecile, out of the kingdom, and secure the possession of the crown for himself. This conspiracy, however, was broken up by the king's return; but by the moderation which Ethelwolf displayed, no evil effects resulted either to himself or to the kingdom. Many of his faithful subjects joined him on his arrival, and offered to expel from the kingdom his son Ethelbald and those who had espoused his cause: but the king would not attend to these suggestions, and with commendable discretion listened to the representations of his son. The event of these counsels was the division of the kingdom into two parts. The kingdom of Wessex, which was by far the most valuable, was given to Ethelbald; and the eastern portion, consisting of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, remained in the hands of Ethelwolf.

This settlement, by which the king's eldest son obtained the object of his wishes, was not, however, of long duration. Ethelwolf, though apparently still far removed from what may be termed an advanced age, did not long survive the partition of the kingdom. He died on the 13th of January, A.D. 858^d, leaving a will, which has attracted the notice of posterity. By this instrument it was directed that the kingdom should be divided between his two eldest sons, Ethelbald and Ethelbert, his private inheritance between his sons, his daughter, and his relations: his money was to be applied, partly to charitable purposes, and in part to the use of his sons and nobles. As regarded that

^d Florence of Worcester.

portion which was devoted to charity, it was directed, that in every ten of his manses, or royal residences, should be maintained one poor man or a stranger, in meat, drink, and clothing, for ever; and that three hundred mancuses^e of gold should every year be carried to Rome, one hundred to buy oil for St. Peter's Church on Easter Eve, one hundred as an offering to St. Paul, and one hundred for the use of the Pope himself^f.

^e Thorn says, the value of the mancus was about seven shillings and sixpence.

^f For fuller particulars on this and similar subjects, the reader is referred to Dr. Lingard's *History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, &c.* They can only be incidentally mentioned in a biographical work like the present.

CHAP. V.

ETHELBALD REIGNS OVER WESSEX, FROM 858 TO 860.—ETHELBERT
OVER THE DEPENDENT KINGDOM OF KENT, SUSSEX, AND ESSEX—
ETHELBALD MARRIES JUDITH, HIS FATHER'S WIDOW—ETHELBALD
DIES—JUDITH RETURNS TO FRANCE.

IN accordance with their father's will, Ethelbald continued to hold the principal sovereignty of Wessex, whilst his brother Ethelbert received the government of Kent, Essex, and Sussex. The first act of the new king of Wessex gave great displeasure to his subjects. Notwithstanding his former opposition to his father's wishes, when that monarch brought with him the princess Judith from the court of France, he now contracted with her a marriage, which, according to every law then in force, was looked upon as incestuous both by the clergy and the laity. As this female, who furnishes perhaps the only instance of one that has been a wife to two kings who have stood in the relation of father and son, was really, as we have before noticed, only thirteen years old when she first contracted marriage with Ethelwolf, we may infer that her union with that monarch was rather nominal than real; but the Church did not recognise such distinctions, and we need not doubt that much scandal arose in the minds of all the subjects of Ethelbald^a. It has even been asserted by some of the later Chroniclers, that

^a Asser, Flor. Sim. Ingulf, Malmesb. Roger de Wendover.

the king repented of his incest, and put away his wife^b; but, if this be true, it was unknown to the contemporary writers, who have related the crime, but not the repentance, of the king. Neither is it likely that the queen herself would have been willing to remain two years in the country which had witnessed her disgrace, for it was not until the year 861, some months after Ethelbald's death, that she returned to her own country where she might be under her father's protection. The character, moreover, of her second husband seems to have been too resolute to have been easily guided or overcome by the monks. It may furnish a favourable view of his military virtues, that, as long as he was king, either alone or in conjunction with his father, the Danes made no attempt to ravage his dominions, and even before he became king, but acted in aiding his father's arms, those restless plunderers met with no success, but were invariably repulsed, whenever they landed on the island. Neither do the Chroniclers fortify by examples the charge of "cruelty and lawlessness" which they bring against Ethelbald, and which those servile imitators have repeated, the one copying from the other, almost in the self-same words. I am more disposed to believe, with the historian of Huntingdon^d, that "Ethelbald was cut off by a premature death, after he had reigned

^b "A. D. 859. Rex West-Saxonum, Ethelbaldus, ab errore supradicto resipiscens, dimissa Juditha noverca sua, cujus torum fœdaverat, peracta pœnitentia, tempore quo supervixit regnum cum pace et justitia temperavit." WENDOVER.

Rudborne quotes these words of Wendover, adding that it was done "sacris exhortationibus beatissimi patris nostri Swithuni." See *Anglia Sacra*, vol. i. p. 204.

^c Wendover, copying from some of the earlier Chroniclers.

^d Henry Hunt.

five years, that all England lamented his youth, and made great mourning over him; for they knew well, and afterwards experienced, what a champion they had lost in him."

King Ethelbald died in 860, having reigned altogether five* years, and was buried at Sherborne. If we believe that the only act of his reign was, to espouse his father's bride, we need not doubt that his early death was regarded, in that age of superstition, as a judgment from God for his offence. The same censure, however, could hardly have been passed upon him, if he hastened to atone, by a divorce, for the crime which he had committed. The fortunes of the lady, who has caused so much controversy among writers, are singularly connected with this country, and historians have taken delight in relating what

* "A Ms. chronicle in the Public Library at Oxon. [Digby 196.] says five years; and so also Robert of Gloucester, Ms. Digb. 305, f. 72, b. Asser [pag. 4.] two years and a half: Ingulfus two years: Polydore Virgil only five months: I suppose from some Ms. history that he had seen. For I find no longer time allowed to his reign in a Ms. which I have consulted in the Bodleian Library. [super Art. D. 19, f. 250, a.] Asser seems to be most exact; for if king Ethelwolf returned from Rome in the year 855, and lived about two years after, it is plain Ethelbald could not reign above two years and a half: for the Saxon annals tell us, that he died in the next year but two, namely, A. D. 860, and that his body was buried at Shireburn. Thomas Rudborne [Hist. Maj. p. 204. vol. i. Ang. Sacra] varies but half a year from the Saxon Annals, Ethelwerd and Malmsbury, who make him to have reigned five years and a half; but then he tells us, that two and a half of them were spent in debauchery, and the remainder in virtue and piety, being persuaded to repent by the exhortations of Swithun, bishop of Winchester. This he had from Girardus Cornubiensis de gestis regum West-Saxonum, lib. ii. a book which seems now to be lost." SPELM. Life of Alf. p. 28.

happened to her after her second husband's death. Judith retired to France, where she was placed by her father in a convent at Senlis, a few miles to the north of Paris, where she was "treated at the same time with the respect due to a queen. The cunning of Judith was, however, more than a match for the vigilance of her guards. By the connivance of her brother she eloped in disguise with Baldwin, great forester of France; and the fugitives were soon beyond the reach of royal resentment. The king prevailed on his bishops to excommunicate Baldwin, for having forcibly carried off a widow; but the Pope disapproved of the sentence; and at his entreaty Charles gave a reluctant consent to their marriage, though neither he nor archbishop Hincmar could be induced to assist at the ceremony. They lived in great magnificence in Flanders, the earldom of which was bestowed on them by the king^e;" her son Baldwin II., who was the second earl of Flanders, afterwards married the princess Elfrida, youngest daughter of Alfred the Great, from which marriage, through five generations, was descended Maud or Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror, and ancestress of the present royal family of Great Britain^f.

^e Lingard, *Hist. of England*.

^f See *Annales Bertiniani*, in Bouquet, tom. vii. p. 77.

CHAP. VI.

ETHELBERT SUCCEEDS ETHELBALD, A.D. 860—WINCHESTER SACKED BY THE DANES IN 860—DEATH OF ST. SWITHUN IN 861—THANET INVADED BY THE DANES IN 864—ETHELBERT DIES IN 866.

ETHELBERT, the second son of Ethelwolf, succeeded without opposition^a to the throne of Wessex, on his brother's death, and thus all the south of England was again united under one king. The family of Egbert were all warlike. The sovereign, who now sat upon the throne, did not degenerate from the military virtues of his predecessors. In the language of Ingulf, the historian of Croyland Abbey, "Ethelbert was a strenuous youth, and an invincible conqueror of the Danes, and he bravely ruled his kingdom five years, and defended it against all their attacks."

But of the battles and victories of Ethelbert the Chroniclers have taken little notice, though enough has been told to make it evident that their invasions were beginning to assume a more fearful character than before. The first attack to which the south of England was subject happened in 860, the year of Ethelbald's death. A large fleet of Danes came to land on the coast of Hampshire: the crews of which stormed Winchester,

^a "Ut justum erat" is the expression of the Chroniclers. Dr. Lingard observes, that, on the death of Ethelbald, the crown of Wessex ought to have descended, in conformity with their father's will, to Ethelwolf's third son Ethelbert, but I find no authority for this in the ancient writers.

the capital of Wessex, and carried off an immense booty; but, as they were returning to their ships, they were met by Alderman Osric with the men of Hampshire, and Alderman Ethelwolf with the men of Berkshire, who defeated the enemy with great slaughter, and drove them in confusion to their ships^b.

From this victory resulted three continuous years of tranquillity, concerning which the Chroniclers are silent, or they record nothing but the unimportant transactions of the monasteries and episcopal Churches; most of which had suffered severely by the Danish invasions. The principal ecclesiastic of this age was Swithun, bishop of Winchester, who, by his political talents, rose to be one of the king's chief ministers, whilst by his supposed piety he gained for himself the designation and honours of a Saint. He died in 861^c, whilst his country was still free from the calamities which afterwards overwhelmed it.

The peace was disturbed in 865, when an army of the heathens landed in Thanet, and having formed their camp, entered into a treaty with the inhabitants. The men of Kent unadvisedly promised them a sum of money, on condition that their lands and property should be spared. But whilst the negotiations were pending, the Danes, who probably only wished to gain time, and to lull the English into security, stole

^b Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt. Rudborne, quoting from Girardus Cornubiensis *de gestis regum West-Saxonum*, and Vigilantius *de basilica Petri*, cap. 13. [Ang. Sacra, vol. i. p. 206.] place the capture of Winchester in the first year of Ethelred, A. D. 866—67. adding that the Danes, whilst they were sacking the city, suddenly entered the monastery, and destroyed all the monks, leaving not one of them alive.

^c Saxon Chronicle.

away by night, and ravaged all the eastern coast. For according to the Chroniclers^d, the faithless traitors knew that they should get more by plunder than the natives had promised them, as was afterwards proved by the event; for they returned with a considerable booty to their ships°. Ethelbert died in the early part of 866, leaving the throne to his next brother Ethelred, together with a load of troubles, from the invasions of the Danes, which seemed now to menace the destruction of the monarchy, and the entire subjugation of the country.

^d Simeon of Durham.

• Roger de Wendover. Malmesbury alone tells us, that the English, seeing the faithlessness of the Danes, assembled an army, and drove them out of the country.

CHAP. VII.

ETHELBERT SUCCEEDS TO THE THRONE—OSBERT KING OF NORTH-UMBERLAND—HIS INSULT TO THE WIFE OF BRUERN, WHO FLEES TO DENMARK—ELLA IS MADE KING OF NORTHUMBERLAND—EDMUND KING OF EAST-ANGLIA—LEGEND OF REGNER LODBROC.

THE reign of Ethelred began under less favourable auspices than that of the two preceding kings his brothers: but our narrative must leave for a while the kingdom of the West-Saxons, to notice events which occurred in other parts of the Heptarchy, and which were of no small importance, because they led to disasters and sufferings that were felt by all the inhabitants of Britain. It will be remembered that after the battle of Ellandune, king Egbert, following up the tide of victory, received the submission of the Kentish, East-Saxon, and South-Saxon kingdoms, and that these countries were afterwards formed into a subordinate monarchy for his children. They never regained independence, and, at the death of Ethelbald, became finally merged in the kingdom of Wessex.

Mercia enjoyed a more happy fate under its king Burrhed, who had married Ethelswitha the daughter of Ethelwolf. Its central position, which had formerly exposed it to continual wars, was now a sort of protection from the inroads of an enemy, who made their approaches only by sea. Burrhed was, however, the last lawful king of Mercia, and his territories were

overrun, like those of the other kings, his neighbours, by the common enemy, as we shall hereafter relate.

But whilst the southern states of the Heptarchy, though harassed by a foreign enemy, nevertheless appear at this time to have enjoyed internal tranquillity, Northumberland alone suffered from intestine discords though as yet almost untouched by the Danes. In 862, when Ethelbert was king of Wessex, Osbert was king of Northumberland. He lost his throne, like the Roman Tarquin, by an injury done to a noble lady, which though not alluded to by the contemporary writers, has been related by later historians, and by no means appears to bear an improbable or legendary character. The following account of it is given in the words of John Brompton, abbat of Jorvaulx, who lived about the year 1200, and has left valuable extracts from earlier Chroniclers, some of which are now lost.

“King Osbert, during a residence at York, went out one day to hunt in a forest not far distant from the city, and on his return called at the house of Bruern Brocard, one of his principal nobles, to refresh himself, after the fatigues of the day. Bruern, knowing nothing of the king’s coming, was gone down to the sea-side to secure the coast against pirates: and his wife, who was a lady of incomparable beauty, and adorned with all the accomplishments which belong to her sex, entertained the king at dinner with due hospitality and splendour. Osbert was charmed with her beauty and her behaviour: as soon as dinner was over, he pretended some secret business of great importance, and, attended to the door by some of his own servants, who were privy to his design, he led her to a private apartment, where he treated her with violence, and committed a shameful breach of the faith which had been reposed

in him. Having thus had his will, he returned to York, whilst the lady, whom he had abused, lamented so bitterly, that her face was sore with weeping. Her husband, upon his return, asked the cause of so sudden a change, and such unusual sadness: upon which she told him all that had happened to her by the violence of the king. When she had finished the story, her husband comforted her, and bade her not to afflict herself, since she could not possibly have resisted so strong a man, and he assured her, that because she had told him the truth, he would not love her less than he had done before; and, by God's good pleasure, would revenge both himself and her for the wrong which had been done them. Immediately after this he sent for all his relations and friends, to whom he revealed the affront which had been put upon him, and his intention to take speedy vengeance for the same. To this they all consented, and approving his design, took horse, and rode with him to York. The king, when he saw him, invited him in civil terms to draw near; but Bruern, having all his relations at his back, defied the king, and renounced his allegiance, giving up all his lands and whatever else he held of him. This done, without any more words, Bruern withdrew, making no stay at all at court. Taking leave of his friends, he sailed straightway into Denmark, where he made a complaint to Codrin^a, king of the country, of the affront offered to him and his wife by Osbert, and desired his speedy succour, that he might be in a condition to take vengeance for the injury. Codrin and the Danes were rejoiced at this event, which gave them a sufficient excuse to invade England, that they might avenge the

^a This name is clearly a corruption or Latinism for Guthrum, a well-known Danish king.

wrongs of Bruern, who was descended from their blood."

In what way the Danish king proceeded to invade England and punish the Northumbrian king, will be presently shewn: but in the mean time, the friends of the injured man had amply avenged the wrong done to their kinsman. Osbert was driven from the throne, and Ella substituted in his stead^b.

The new king was not, however, of royal blood, and his subjects were soon discontented with his rule. A party of them soon recalled Osbert; a civil war commenced between the two kings, and was only interrupted by the approach of the formidable enemy which was to crush both of them.

Whilst these events passed in the other kingdoms of the Heptarchy, East-Anglia, saved from subjection to the Mercians by the victory of Egbert at Ellandune, is almost lost to our sight for more than thirty years, until the time of King Edmund, who reigned from 855 to 869. To him also is attached a tale, more legendary than that of Bruern, and less worthy to be credited, both because it is tinctured with the marvel-

^b The six earlier authorities, Sax. Chr., Asser, &c. notice the quarrel between Osbert and Ella, but they seem to have been ignorant of the story of Bruern Bocard, (otherwise called Biorn Butsekarl). They relate the event retrospectively under the year 867, but 863 is the generally received date of Ella's accession. See "Geffrei Gaimar, v. 2591 sq. Douglas of Glastonbury, MS. Hamb. Brompton, pp. 802, 809. Hector Boethii Hist. Scot. A nearly similar adventure of king Ælle with Ærnulf, a rich merchant of York, surnamed the sea-farer, and his beautiful wife at Beckwith, is related by the editor of Gaimar, from a MS. of the 12th century, (C.C.C.C., No. cxxxix.) as the cause of the coming of Ivar and Ubba. See Corpus Hist. p. 795." Thorpe, note to Lappenberg, vol. ii. p. 32.

lous, and because it is at variance with the generally received history of the same individual—if they are the same—who figures as the principal actor in the narrative. The legend, as it appears in the chronicle of John Brompton, from which it was copied by Matthew of Westminster, is as follows:—

“ There was a man of royal birth in the kingdom of Denmark, named Lodbroc, who had two sons, Hinguar and Hubba. This man embarked one day with his hawk in a small boat, to catch ducks and other wild fowls on the adjoining sea coasts and islands. A terrible storm at length arose, by which Lodbroc was carried away, and tossed for several days over every part of the Ocean. After numberless perils, he was cast ashore on the coast of Norfolk, near the village of Redham. Here he was found having his hawk alone for his companion, and presented to king Edmund. That monarch, struck with the manly beauty of his form, retained him at his court, and heard from his own mouth the recital of his adventures. He was then associated with Berne the king’s huntsman, and indulged in all the pleasures of the chase, for in the exercises both of hunting and hawking he was remarkably graceful, and succeeded in capturing both birds and beasts according as he had a mind. This, however, produced jealousy in the mind of Berne the huntsman, who one day, as they were going out together hunting, set upon Lodbroc unawares, and having foully slain him, buried his body in the thickets of the forest. But Lodbroc was the master of a small dog of the harrier species, which he had nourished from its birth, and which loved him much. When Berne the huntsman returned home with the other hounds, this little dog remained alone with its master’s

body. In the morning the king asked what had become of Lodbroc; to which Berne replied, that he had parted from him yesterday in the wood, and had not seen him since. At that moment the harrier entered the hall, and went round, wagging its tail, and fawning on the whole company, and especially on the king. When he had eaten his fill, he again left the hall: this occurred repeatedly, until some one at last followed the dog to see where he went, and, having found the body of Lodbroc, they told the story to the king. The affair was now diligently enquired into, and when the truth was at last discovered, the huntsman was exposed on the sea without oars in the boat which had belonged to Lodbroc. In a few days he was cast ashore in Denmark, and brought before the sons of Lodbroc, who putting him to the torture, demanded him what had become of their father, to whom they knew the boat belonged. To this Berne replied, that their father Lodbroc had fallen into the hands of Edmund king of East-Anglia, by whose orders he had been put to death."

The story ends with the invasion of England, accompanied by those circumstances of rapine and bloodshed which we know from authentic history to have occurred in 866, the year in which Ethelred succeeded to the throne of Wessex.

It will, perhaps, never be ascertained, how far we may trust the stories above related as the principal motives which induced the Danes at this time to invade England on a larger scale than before. But it has been observed, that the story of Lodbroc is differently told by authentic historians. According to the most credible accounts, Regner Lodbroc, a Danish chieftain, and a man of extraordinary talents and

valour, was about this time induced by circumstances to extend his expeditions beyond the limits of the Baltic, to which the piracies of his countrymen had previously been for the most part confined. The adventurous sea-king spread terror over all the islands of the northern ocean. He even carried his ravages into the interior of France, as far as Paris, which he took by storm, and ransomed for a large payment of money. At last this free-booter was overcome by the very means which he fancied would elevate him above all his fellows. He had ordered some ships of a larger size than usual to be constructed, without considering that his men would be unable to navigate them through the narrow seas and on the sloping beaches, where their descents upon the land were effected. These vessels were wrecked upon the coast of England, and Regner, with a small band of men, forgetting that they had lost the means of securing their plunder, commenced their usual career of devastation. Ella, king of Northumberland, marched to meet him. The invaders, after a fierce resistance, were overcome, and Regner made prisoner. The unhappy captive was placed by his captor in a dungeon, where he was slowly stung to death by snakes^c.

When the news of Regner's death reached Denmark, his sons, two of whom were Hinguar and Ubba, swore to avenge him. The bands of Scandinavia tuned their harps to the praises of the fallen hero: his actions were chaunted throughout the islands of the north, and the death-song of Regner Lodbroc, a curious remnant of Scandinavian verse, which has

^c Saxo Gram. p. 176. Soræ 1654. Pet. Olaus, apud Langbeck, p. 111. Hafniæ 1772.

come down to our own times, animated his countrymen to battle and to vengeance^d.

^d On the subject of this Scandinavian warrior, see particularly Turner's *Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons*, book iv. ch. iii. and the authorities there quoted.

CHAP. VIII.

THE PARENTAGE AND EARLY LIFE OF KING ALFRED—HIS EDUCATION
—STORY OF THE BOOK OF POEMS—IS AFFLICTED WITH A SEVERE
DISEASE.

THE Chroniclers have delighted to trace the lineage of ALFRED THE GREAT into those early times of obscurity, where the dispassionate historian declines to follow them. He was the fourth son of Ethelwolf, and grandson of Egbert, through whom his pedigree ascended to Woden, and from thence upwards through twenty-three generations, to Adam^a. The juvenile years of Alfred were, no doubt, occupied with the sports and recreations which generally engage the minds of children. The first circumstance which has been recorded of him, is his journey to Rome, as we have already described it, in the company of Swithun bishop of Winchester: he was hardly seven years old, when he again made the journey in his father's company; and it has been remarked by a modern historian^b, whose opinions generally deserve attention from their soundness, whilst his writings are charac-

^a This pedigree, according to Asser, Florence, and Simeon, is as follows: Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahaleel, Enoch, Methusalem, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Bedwig, Huala, Hathra, Itermod, Heremod, Sceldwea, Beaw, Cætwa, Geata, Fingodwolf, Frithwolf, Frealaf, Frithwalde, Woden, Beldeg, Brond, Gewis, Elesa, Cerdic, Creoda, Cynric, Ceaulin, Cuthwine, Cutha, Ceolwalde, Coenred, Ingild brother of Ine, Eoppa, Eafa, Elmund, Egbert, Ethelwolf.

^b S. Turner, Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons.

terised by the depth of his research, that to the impressions made upon the child's mind at this time is to be traced that strong bias towards improvement, which throughout his whole life was the mainspring of all his actions. But the impressions which were made upon the tender age of Alfred must have been unusually strong to have outlived the rude and boisterous scenes in which the next fifteen years of his life were spent. With this question, however, is blended another historical difficulty which arrests us in our enquiry, too important to be overlooked. Was Osburga, Alfred's mother, still alive when her little boy returned from Rome? His father king Ethelwolf, as we have seen, took another wife, Judith, daughter to the king of France; which would seem to imply that queen Osburga was no longer living. But when we remember that his mother-in-law was scarcely thirteen years of age, at the time of her marriage with Ethelwolf, it seems improbable—in my own opinion, impossible—that to her can be ascribed that maternal solicitude, to which Alfred, scarcely six years younger than herself, could have been indebted for the superiority of his attainments, his initiation in literature, and the general amiability and worth of his character.

That we may be the better able to judge on this point, it will be useful to listen to the narrative of the contemporary writer—and in his own words. “He was loved by his father and mother, and even by the people generally, above all his brothers, and was educated altogether at the court of the king. As he advanced through the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than that of his brothers; in look, in speech, and in manners, he was more graceful than they. His noble nature implanted in

him from his cradle a love of wisdom above all things, but—with shame be it spoken—by the unworthy neglect of his parents and nurses, he remained illiterate even till he was twelve years old or more; but he listened with serious attention to the Saxon poems which he often heard recited, and easily retained them in his docile memory. He was a zealous follower of the chase in all its branches, and hunted with great assiduity and success; for skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God, as we have often also witnessed.

“Now, on a certain day, his mother was shewing him and his brothers a Saxon book of poetry, which she held in her hand, and said, ‘Whichever of you shall the soonest learn this volume, shall have it for his own.’ Stimulated by these words, or rather by the Divine inspiration, and allured by the beautifully illuminated letter at the beginning of the volume, Alfred spoke before all his brothers, who, though his seniors in age, were not so in grace, and answered, ‘Will you really give that book to one of us, that is to say, to him who can first understand and repeat it to you?’ At this his mother smiled with satisfaction, and confirmed what she had before said: upon which the boy took the book out of her hand, and went to his master and read it to him, and in due time brought it to his mother, and recited it^c.”

If we subject this story to the severe test which criticism and chronology supply, we shall find it involved in many difficulties; but the operation is necessary for the cause of truth; and happily the conclusion, to which the argument leads us, will re-unite the

^c Asser gives this account retrospectively under the year 864.

connection that has been severed between Osburga and her child—between the greatest of English kings and that fond mother, to whom he owed the real virtues of his shining character. It will, then, be remarked, in the narrative which has been just recited, that Alfred's education did not commence until he was *twelve years old or more*; i. e. in the year 861, for he was born in 849, as all our historians agree. It is unimportant to our argument, whether he then began first to read, or whether, having already acquired the art of reading, he then learnt by heart the book which his mother gave him. If the latter be the true statement of the case, he must have been still older, and the same observations apply with greater force. In the year 861, his father Ethelwolf had been dead five years; his eldest brother Ethelbald had succeeded to the throne, married his step-mother Judith, and after a reign of between two and three years, had also descended to the grave. In his stead was reigning Ethelbert, the second brother, who, having already been king of Kent, must have arrived at man's estate, and consequently could not have been one of the children to whom the queen displayed the Book of Poems which caught the attention of Alfred. It is clear, therefore, that Ethelred and Alfred only could have been residing under the mother's care, when the little incident took place in Alfred's life, which has attracted the notice of all his biographers. But who was the mother that, in a dark age, directed the minds of her children to the only means by which they could emerge into a light that should benefit themselves, their country, and the world? It could not be Judith, for that princess, still little more than seventeen years of age, retired in 861 to the court of her father the king of France, where she

soon after married Baldwin the First, surnamed *Bras de Fer*, count of Flanders. The preceptress of Alfred must, therefore, have been his own mother Osburga^d, of whose previous death we have no record, and who probably was living, like the empress Josephine, in retirement, but engaged in training the mind of her youngest child for the high duties which he was afterwards to fulfil. We are justified, then, in forming for ourselves a picture of domestic happiness under the roof of queen Osburga, which will augment rather than satisfy our desire to know more of the youthful years of Alfred, and enhance the interest which every Englishman should take in his history.

The subject of Alfred's early education is of so much importance to a correct view of his life and character, that it is dangerous to indulge in speculation, unsupported by the few records which the narrative of his contemporary biographer supplies. After the incident of the book, which seems to have first given him a taste for study, "he learned," as his biographer tells us, "the daily course, that is, the celebration of the Hours^e;" and afterwards certain psalms and prayers, contained in a book, which he kept day and night in his bosom, as we ourselves have seen, and carried about with him to assist his prayers,

^d In my translation of Asser's *Life of Alfred*, page 51 of "Six old Chronicles," pub. in Bohn's *Antiquarian Library*, I have added a note, that Judith must have been meant, not Osburga, who was dead. When that note was written, I took it for granted that the usually received opinion was correct; but I have since examined for myself, and have no hesitation in retracting the note as inaccurate.

* The Services of the Church, which belonged to the different divisions of the day and night, were called "*HORÆ*," *Hours*: thus there were "*Horæ beatæ Virginis Mariæ*," "*Hours of the Blessed Virgin*," &c.

amid all the bustle and business of this present life. But, sad to say, he could not gratify his most ardent wish to learn the liberal arts, because, as he remarked, there were no good readers¹ at that time in all the kingdom of the West-Saxons." By the liberal arts were implied Grammar, Music, Geometry, and the other Sciences, which were at that time to be learnt through the medium of the Latin tongue only; for by the universal sovereignty of Rome, the vernacular languages of the conquered nations, however they may have retained their place as the idiom of the people at large, were in every case superseded by the Latin as the language of the Court, and of Polite Literature. Afterwards, also, when the whole of Europe was ruled no longer by the sword of the baron, but by the crozier of the bishop, the same slavery of the mind was continued; nor, after the lapse of so many centuries, has it entirely been removed, in any country of the civilized world. The Anglo-Saxons, even in the age of Alfred, and indeed earlier, as might be easily shewn, if this were the place for the discussion, speedily began to emancipate themselves from the trammels of a foreign language, and they aspired, as the numerous Manuscripts still existing fully prove, to the honours of a national literature, in their own dialect, and consequently accessible to all. But learning, like liberty, is a plant of slow growth, and does not easily become rooted in a new soil: and by the storms which assailed the young shoot, in the age of Dunstan, and afterwards at the time of the Norman conquest, the Anglo-Saxon literature was stifled even before it

¹ LECTORES, literally *readers*, probably in this passage designates teachers, professors, or, as they would have been afterwards termed, and are still called, at our Universities, *Prælectores*.

had time to acquire maturity. But, when Alfred began first to turn his thoughts towards learning, the level even of Latin literature was so low, that the young prince hardly knew where to find a teacher in all his brother's dominions. The first impulse, which had been given to Latin literature among the Anglo-Saxons by the arrival of Archbishop Theodore, Abbat Hadrian, and the scholars who accompanied them in the seventh century, had been of short duration in proportion to the rapidity of its growth. The most celebrated scholar, who sprung from the seed thus planted in England, was the Venerable Bede; whose works comprehend almost every branch of the learning of his time. But that which is confined to the cloister never can be popular, nor can those writings which are consigned to the keeping of a foreign tongue, ever be understood by the great mass of the people. We have therefore no proof that the school of Theodore produced any sensible effect, such as a vernacular literature always produces, in softening the manners or even in enlarging the comprehension of those whom he came to enlighten. In the next generation, learning fled from Britain as rapidly as she had come. The court of Charlemagne was now her favoured resting-place. Thither resorted Alcuin and Dungal, the former from England, the latter out of Scotland or Ireland, Fridugisus, and a host of ecclesiastics, whilst our own island for many years produced nothing but a tame retinue of monks, whose missals, penitentials, and rituals of every kind, still remain to convince us how unproductive was a soil which had given promise to become so fruitful.

At a later period of Alfred's life, when the cares and responsibilities of sovereignty, cooperating with the suggestions of his own active and noble intellect, had

taught him that which is more valuable than all the rest, the knowledge of himself and of human things, "he confessed with sighs and lamentations, that this was one of the greatest difficulties and impediments of his life, namely, that when he was young and had the capacity for learning, he could not find teachers; but, when he was more advanced in life, he was harassed by so many diseases unknown to all the physicians of this island, as well as by the internal and external anxieties of sovereignty, and by the continual invasions of the pagans, and had his teachers and writers also so much disturbed, that there was no time for reading. But yet, among the impediments of this present life, from infancy up to the present time [890], and, as I believe, even until his death, he continued to feel the same desire of knowledge, and still aspires after it^d."

But the passion for improvement, which burnt so ardently in the mind of the young prince, and which will always be prominent in every noble mind, was not exempt from the common lot: on the contrary, it was curbed and repressed by an infliction of Providence more painful than generally falls to the share of man. Whilst still a boy, he was seized with a severe complaint, which harassed him for many years. The nature and origin of this malady are unknown to us^e; but his

^d ASSER. The last sentence of this quotation is a perfect specimen of the clumsy and inartificial style of the Latin Chroniclers. If Asser wrote this paragraph whilst Alfred still lived, how could he say that Alfred, even until his death, felt the same desire, &c. &c.? If, however, Alfred was dead, how could the writer add the words, "and still aspires after it?" We must suppose him to mean, "to the time of my writing, he still aspires to the desire of knowledge, and, as I believe, will continue to do so, even until his death."

^e The Latin name of it is 'ficus,' a kind of 'fistula,' or 'piles.'

contemporaries, in the spirit of the age, ascribed it, some to the Divine interposition, and others to the agency of the Devil. His biographer Asser has given us the following account of it:

“In the flower of his youth, before he entered the marriage-state, he wished to strengthen his mind in the observance of God’s commandments, for he perceived that he could with difficulty abstain from gratifying his carnal desires; and because he feared the anger of God, if he should do any thing contrary to his will, he used often to rise in the morning at the time of cock-crowing, and go to pray in the Churches and at the relics of the saints. There he prostrated himself on the ground, and prayed that God in his mercy would strengthen his mind still more in his service by some infirmity such as he might bear, but not such as would render him imbecile and contemptible in his worldly duties; and when he had often prayed with much devotion to this effect, after an interval of some time, Providence vouchsafed to afflict him with the above-named disease, which he bore long and painfully for many years, and even despaired altogether of life, until he at last got rid of it by his prayers.” That the disease which afflicted Alfred, either came or went by a peculiar Providence, can no longer be admitted as a subject even of speculation, but it shews the character of the times, and is a valuable proof both of the estimate formed of the piety of the young prince, and of the interest which he possessed in the hearts of the people, extending even to the affairs of his person and private life. Another legend—for it rests on equal improbability—informs us, that he was cured of his infirmity, by Modwen, a female saint in Ireland, whose

virtues at this time excited the wonder of the world, and augmented the wealth and influence of the Church^b. But it is scarcely doubtful that Alfred was never in Ireland: we read of no such connection between the sister islands in his time, as had existed in a previous generation. If Ireland ever was distinguished for learning in very early times, it had again become unknown to the rest of the world, until it was annexed to the English crown by Henry II, and certainly furnished no temptation to the royal family of Ethelwolf to visit it for any purpose of either religion, learning, or science.

Whilst, then, the mind of the young Alfred was grasping at every available source of information, the culture of his body by such exercises as were then usual among his countrymen was not neglected. In all nations, the chase has been looked upon as a miniature representation of the art of war, for which it is in fact a salutary mode of preparation. In its early state, the military art could hardly be acquired without the practical lessons which hunting affords: the evolutions of the field, which in modern times may be partly learnt on paper, by the rules of the Geometric art, could then only be acquired by actual experience and much personal fatigue in the plains and in the forest. That Alfred was not backward to learn the first principles of so necessary an art, is evident from all the history of his life. When he afterwards led the Anglo-Saxon spearmen to battle, he was foremost in exposing himself to danger, which in fact was familiar to him under all its forms. As a youth he had led the chase through the wilds of Selwood forest, in the

^b Higden's Polychronicon in Gale and Fell, vol. iii. p. 256. Hist. aur. Joan. Tinmuth MS. in the Bodl. Library.

woods of Gloucestershire, of Kent, and of Sussex, and had even passed the border of Cornwall, a country still inhabited by the Britons, where perhaps the wild beasts which he ardently followed, were not the only enemies that he had to fear. It was, perhaps, in an excursion of this kind¹ that he came to a church, near Liskeard, where reposed the body of a holy man, St. Guerir, and where, as tradition informs us, another holy man, St. Neot, Alfred's own friend and adviser, afterwards was buried. The prince dismounted from his horse, and entering the house of prayer, threw himself prostrate before the altar, and entreated of God's mercy, that he would exchange the malady with which, at his own request, he had so long been afflicted, for some lighter disease, but still with the same condition annexed to it, that such disease should not shew itself outwardly in his body, lest he should be an object of contempt, and so be the less able to benefit mankind; "for," says the Chronicler, "he had great dread of leprosy or blindness, or any such complaint, as makes useless or contemptible those whom it afflicts. When he had finished his prayers, he proceeded on his journey, and not long after he felt within him that by the hand of the Almighty he was healed according to his request of his disorder, and that it was entirely eradicated."

We must now resume the thread of our narrative at the point from which we digressed, in 866, when Ethelred, surnamed the First, ascended the throne, after the death of his brothers, Ethelbald and Ethelbert.

¹ So, at least, Asser represents it, and is quoted by Turner, in his *Hist. of Anglo-Saxons*, 6th edit. vol. ii. p. 503.

CHAP. IX.

ACCESSION OF ETHELRED IN 866—THE DANISH CHIEFTAINS, HINGUAR AND HUBBA, INVADE EAST-ANGLIA AND NORTHUMBERLAND—THEY TAKE YORK ON MARCH 1, 867—OSBERT AND ELLA ARE SLAIN IN APRIL, 867—DEATH OF ALSTAN, BISHOP OF SALISBURY—THE DANES INVADE MERCA, AND TAKE NOTTINGHAM IN 868—BURRHED, KING OF MERCA, SENDS TO ETHELRED FOR ASSISTANCE—ALFRED'S MARRIAGE WITH ELSWITHA—THE DANES RETURN TO YORK—THEIR RAVAGES IN THE ADJACENT COUNTRY, PARTICULARLY AT THE MONASTERIES OF BARDNEY, CROYLAND, PETERBOROUGH, AND ELY.

WHEN the third of Ethelwolf's children succeeded to the inheritance of his family, the assaults of the Danish invaders became more alarming, both for their number and their magnitude. Of the causes which have been adduced by the Chroniclers for this fact, we have taken notice in a preceding chapter: all of them, it must be admitted, are of a romantic character, and would hardly be received as rational causes for such important events, if they were to occur in an age so practical as that in which we now live; but, as in visual objects,

'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,
And clothes the mountain in its azure hue,

so must we take the legends of antiquity as resting on a groundwork of truth, though not wholly to be received in all the colouring and imagery which time has thrown around them. It is also worthy of remark, that, as the smallest ripple in the water produces an effect that is felt to a great distance, so kindred events,

proceeding probably from some chain of causation still unknown to us, will often arise, and, floating together down the tide of human things, cause sensible changes in the fate of nations or on the surface of the material world. The same causes which dispersed the sea-kings with their crews of desperate followers over the seas of the north, produced, no doubt, many romantic adventures, worthy to be commemorated in the popular ballads and songs of the time. It would be too daring to question the existence of Regner Lodbroc, or to deny that he carried the enterprises, for which his countrymen had long been famous, to a greater extent than had ever been done before.

It has been truly remarked, that some private motives, such as the legends before mentioned will furnish, probably at this time influenced the Danish leaders to renew their aggressions against the English coasts on a much more extended scale. And this motive could hardly have been furnished by their entertaining a low estimate of the courage or abilities of the new king. Ethelred was, certainly, in little or nothing inferior to his two brothers who had gone before him; his reign of five years, from A.D. 866 to 871, was a succession of battles, in which he was sometimes defeated, sometimes victorious, against armies more numerous and ferocious than any which had before appeared in England. In all these encounters, however, he displayed great personal valour; and was ably seconded by his younger brother Alfred, who now first bore arms against the invaders of his country, and began now to shew, in the school of adversity, that combined spirit of valour and patient endurance, which enabled him at last to raise his country from the ruin and desolation in which all the

rest of northern Europe was plunged. The series of battles which are almost the only memorials of Ethelred's reign, cannot be thought unworthy of minute attention, if they place before us in a stronger light the calamitous state to which our country was reduced, when Alfred was left alone, at his brother's death, to vindicate, not the liberty of his countrymen, but the very existence of the Anglo-Saxon name.

The new king was hardly seated on the throne, when a large fleet of the Northmen approached the eastern coasts of England, and entering the Wash, landed a large army of warriors, commanded by Hinguar and Hubba, sons of Regner Lodbroc, who had been put to death^a. The large force, which their chieftains now led to avenge their father's death, has been described by modern writers^b as collected out of every country of the North, and burning to avenge the death of their kinsmen: but it is not equally clear in what part of the island they first landed. Whilst the six earlier Chronicles describe their descent in East-Anglia—where king Edmund was now in the twelfth year of his reign—the truce which they observed with the natives for a year, on condition of being supplied with horses^c, and

^a Saxon Ch. Ass. Ethel. &c. &c. Some of these writers mention Hinguar only as commanding the Danish fleet, others of them, especially the Saxon Chronicle, do not mention the names of the leaders.

^b "Jutes, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Russians, and others; all the fury and all the valour of the North assembled for the expedition, while none of the Anglo-Saxon kings even suspected the preparations." TURNER, *Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons*, vol. i. p. 506.

^c "The use that the Germans made of their horse was much like that the Britons did of their little chariots the *Essedæ*, by their speed to get advantages, and to give sudden and unexpected assaults, of which when once they found the opportunity, then quitting their

their subsequent march, in 867, to York, Brompton, the historian of Jorvaulx, tells us, that the army first landed on the south-eastern promontory of Northumberland, and, marching through the district of Holderness, seized on the city of York, from which Hinguar, one of the brothers, was dispatched with a separate detachment to invade East-Anglia, and take vengeance on Edmund its king.

When we consider the proximity of the Northumbrian kingdom to Norfolk, which was the northern part of East-Anglia^d, we can hardly fail to observe, that so large a fleet would in all probability fill the narrow seas into which they were crowded, and that descents would take place on many points of the coast, as the

horse and casting themselves into the order of a foot-army, (which they ever preferred to try their fortune, in committing their safety rather to their own manhood, than the casualty of their horse,) they so (as Cæsar speaketh) attained a great difficulty, to have at once both the speed of horsemen and the stability of a foot-army. And this kind of mixed practice aptly served the turn of these rovers: for their war being mostly inroads, foraging, and spoil, subject to skirmishes and unexpected præliations, this changeable service was agreeable to their uncertain occasions. But, for service on horseback, it had been impossible for the champion and coasterly parts of the kingdom (where they landed) to furnish such numbers of them with horses, for strength and manage, fitting for the occasions of the field: neither had these kind of people that manner of service in practice. So that, whereas it often occurs in the stories of these rovers, that they got horse and became horse-men, we must understand it only for their speedy transport, and that their service was, like their ancestors, for the most part ever on foot. The manner is somewhat to this day to be observed in the German wars in the service of the horse-men called Dragoons." SPELMAN, *Life of Alfred*, p. 32.

^d The county of Lincoln was sometimes part of Northumberland, and sometimes part of Mercia, to which, I suppose, it at this time belonged.

fancy or the avarice of the different chieftains might suggest. Neither is it unlikely that the hostile leaders, having two injuries* to avenge, might be induced, by confidence in the multitude of their men, to take hostile occupation, from the first, of both the banks of the rivers up which they had sailed. It appears, however, certain, that no further operations were taken for a year† against the East-Anglians, in consequence of the truce which has been alluded to; and it is probable, that if any portion of the Danes, according to the statement of Brompton, landed in the kingdom of Northumberland, they also suspended operations for some months. How far this inactivity may have been occasioned by a wish to deceive the English into security, or that they might receive further reinforcements from abroad, we are not informed: when, however, they at length moved from their camp, the whole force of the invasion was directed against the Northumbrians, who prepared manfully to defend themselves. The first measure which was taken, in the general danger, was to effect a reconciliation between Ella, king *de facto*, and Osbert, who had been invited by a portion of the people to resume the crown which he had lost. Neither of the rivals was unmindful, in this emergency, of the duties which they owed to their country. They ceased to make war upon each other, and turned their arms in the same direction for the common good. The city of York, which was not at that time fortified so strongly as afterwards in the reign of Alfred, had yielded, on the first of March, 867, to the first attack

* Namely, the insult done to the wife of Bruern Brocard, (see page 73.) and the death of Regner Lodbroc, (p. 78.)

† All the Chroniclers agree that the Danes remained inactive twelve months in East-Anglia.

of the Pagans, and the two Northumbrian kings; uniting their forces, marched in the beginning of April to regain it. The Danes fled into the city at their approach, and prepared to repel the invaders from the battlements. But the walls were unable to resist the fierce attack of the English, who broke through the feeble barrier, and rushed into the city with the fugitive Danes. This, however, proved their ruin: the enemy, rallying in the streets, surrounded the English on all sides, and cut them to pieces without difficulty: those who were able to escape out of the town, saved themselves by a hasty and disastrous flight. In this battle, Osbert and Ella were both slain*, and the whole country fell into the possession of the Danes, who placed over it one Egbert, bearing the name of

* Brompton, however, says, that Osbert only was slain in the battle at York. "Ella," he continues, "had been hunting that day in the forest, and after the chase was over, was sitting at meat with his attendants, to whom he observed that they had done well that day, having taken four deer and six fawns." "It may be so," replied one of the attendants, "but whilst you have been gaining them here, you have lost a hundred times their value elsewhere; for the Danes have taken the city of York, slain Osbert your partner in the kingdom, and are now advancing into your dominions to attack yourself." Ella, hearing this news, summoned his men, and marched to attack the enemy in York: but the Danes issuing out of that city, attacked Ella at a place which, in memory of the event, has since been called Ellescroft, and defeated him, after slaying a large number of his men. The conclusion of the fortunes of Ella is found in the Northern historians. He was taken prisoner, and treated by Hinguar and Hubba with the cruelty which often ended the lives of their captives. In vengeance for their father Lodbroc's sufferings, these merciless chieftains cut the back of Ella in two, and dividing his ribs, threw salt into the opening, to increase the agony of his death. See *Frag. Isl.* 2 Lang. 279. *Ragnar Saga*, ib. *The Scalld. Sigvatr. ib.* and *Saxo Grammaticus*, as quoted by Turner, *H. Ang. Sax.* i. p. 510.

king, but, in reality, as their own tool and vassal. The real sovereign of Northumberland, from this moment, was Hinguar the Dane, and the whole country began more and more to assume the character of a Danish settlement, for the native Anglo-Saxons, disturbed by long sedition, and recently humbled by their severe defeats in war, had no longer the ability, even if they still had the will, to resist the invaders.

Such was the course of events in the kingdom of Northumbria, in the year 867; and about the same time in the south of England, died Alstan, bishop of Salisbury, formerly one of the chief ministers of Egbert, in whose reign, as in the reigns of his son and three grandsons, he had been most active in repressing the ravages of the Danes. It was also by his exertions, principally, that all the Saxon kingdoms in the south had been brought to acknowledge the supremacy of the family of Egbert^h.

In the following year, 868, whilst a portion of the Danes repaired the breaches in the walls of York, which they now made their capital, the main body of their troops invaded the neighbouring kingdom of Mercia, and marched to Nottingham, which, the Chroniclers tell us, was called in the British tongue "Tiggo Cobauc," or the "House of Caves." Here the Danes took up their residence for the winter. But "immediately on their approach, Burrhed, king of Mercia, and all the nobles of that nation, sent messengers to Ethelred, king of the West-Saxons, and his brother Alfred, suppliantly entreating them to come and aid them in fighting against the enemyⁱ." This request, sanctioned by the good understanding which

^h Matthew of Westminster, Asser.

ⁱ Sax. Chron. &c.

had for so many years existed between the two kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia, was also congenial to the disposition of the West-Saxon brothers, who could not avoid perceiving the advantage of combining to crush the common enemy. There was, moreover, another tie, but lately formed, which bound the two countries in a bond of friendship and alliance. Osburga, probably, like Rachel in Holy Writ, wished that her son Alfred might take a wife out of her own country Mercia. Among the noblemen of that province was a name-sake of the West-Saxon king, Ethelred, Alderman of the Gaini, surnamed from his size "Mickle," or "the Big." The wife of this Ethelred was Edburga, descended from the Mercian royal family, and probably a relative of Osburga. But Edburga, unlike the former queen of that name, who disgraced her family and rank, was a virtuous, and, in the language of Asser, who saw her a few years before her death, "a venerable lady, who survived her husband, and passed the remainder of her life in widowhood?" This lady by Ethelred, had a daughter named Elswitha, whom Alfred now asked and obtained in marriage. The union was a happy one, as has been inferred by Turner, from the earnestness with which Alfred in his translation of Boethius speaks on the subject of connubial affection^k.

Obeying the summons of the Mercian king, Ethelred accompanied by his brother, now in the twentieth year of his age, marched with all the forces of Wessex to Nottingham, eager to repulse the enemy. But the pagans, perceiving the numbers of the English, retired into the town; and the Christians on their part being unable to force the strong walls with which Notting-

^k Turner, *Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons*, vol. ii. p. 511.

ham was surrounded, both sides were of necessity led to make terms. A pacification ensued; the West-Saxon princes returned with their army into Wessex, and the Danes, after remaining the rest of the year at Nottingham, returned, in 869, with a large booty¹ to York, which was the centre of all their operations^m. Whilst the main body of the army remained in this city, their marauding troops carried desolation through the whole neighbourhood, and at the same time a severe famine, attended by a mortality both of men and cattle, combined with the atrocities of the war, rendered the misery of the Northumbrians completeⁿ. During the year which the Danes now spent at York^o, they indulged in every possible kind of licentiousness and cruelty, rioting in the blood of men, women, and children, and making spoil of every thing which fell into their hands. The atrocities which they committed, are said to have exceeded the power of

¹ Ingulf.

^m Sax. Chron. Asser. &c. "In a charter of Burrhed ap. Ingulf. that prince expresses his thanks to the bishops, abbats, and other ecclesiastics, who, waving their exemption from military service granted them by Ethelwolf, came to his aid on this occasion 'gratias exsolvo speciales omni exercitui meo, maxime tamen viris ecclesiasticis, episcopis et abbatibus aliis etiam inferioris status et dignitatis, qui, licet piissimæ memoriæ rex quondam Ethelwulfus, pater meus, per sacratissimam chartam suam, ab omni expeditione militari vos liberos reddiderit, et ab omni servitio seculari penitus absolutos; dignissima tamen miseratione super oppressiones Christianæ plebis, ecclesiarumque ac monasteriorum destructiones luctuosas benignissime compassi, contra nefandissimos paganos in exercitum Domini prompti et spontanei convenistis,' &c. This charter is dated from Nottingham, 'anno 868, cal. Aug.' Its genuineness is of course questionable." Thorpe, note to Lappenberg, ii. p. 34.

ⁿ Asser.

^o Crudeliter uno anno permansit. H. HUNT.

description: young and old, clergy and laity, monks and nuns, were all victims of their fury,—the last, often, with such aggravated circumstances as the nature of the case will suggest. But, if the worm will turn upon the heel that crushes it, so also did the purity of the cloister rebel against the contumelies which they knew would follow from the unbridled passions of the Danish robbers. In Coldingham, an abbey in Yorkshire, Ebba, the lady abbess, foreseeing, from the proximity of the enemy, that her own house would shortly be attacked, and valuing her honour more than life itself, called the nuns into the Chapter-house, where she made to them such a touching address, setting forth the wild passions and cruelty of the Danes, that they all promised to listen to her words, and implicitly follow her advice. Upon this the abbess, seizing a knife, cut off with it her nose and upper lip, and the whole sisterhood immediately redeemed their promise by mutilating themselves in the same manner. The next day the Danish troops invaded the monastery, and seeing the horrible spectacle, recoiled from their victims, and gave orders that the house should be fired. This command was immediately executed, and the abbey was burnt to ashes, together with the abbess and her nuns, who were willing to suffer martyrdom for the preservation of that which was dearer to them than their lives.

Nor did the Danes discharge their fury upon the monastery of Coldingham alone, but upon all the other monasteries in the kingdom of Northumberland. It was not long since they had levelled to the ground the monastery and Church of Lindisfarne, the abbeys of Jarrow and Weremouth, together with the famous nunneries of Streaneshalch, afterwards called Whitby,

and Tynemouth; most of these were never afterwards rebuilt, or, if they were ultimately restored, it was not until they had for ages presented to the eye a scene of havoc and of ruins ^p.

When the winter of 869 was ended, the Danes took ship and crossed the Humber into Lindsay, one of the three divisions of the county of Lincoln, and landing at Humberstan, ravaged the whole country: the ancient and famous abbey of Bardney was burnt to the ground, and all the monks, who inhabited it, slain in the Church without mercy.

The plunderers remained in the neighbourhood until Michaelmas, burning and ravaging whatever fell in their way. During the month of September, Algar the brave, Alderman or Earl of Hoiland^q, collected all the youth of his province, and in conjunction with two knights his seneschals, Wibert and Leofric, whose lands in those parts were afterwards by the peasants called Wibberton and Lefrington, in memory of their brave possessors, took steps to check the progress of the invaders. They were joined by a brave body of two hundred men from Croyland abbey, led by one Toly, who was at this time a monk, but had formerly been a soldier of much repute in the Mercian armies. Three hundred stout and warlike men more came from Deeping, Langtoft, and Boston, besides Morcar, Lord of Brunne, with a large and numerous body of retainers belonging to his own household, and a body of 500 troops headed by Osgot, the brave sheriff of Lincolnshire. All these mustered on the festival of St. Mau-

^p The Saxon Chronicle and other early authorities do not mention these cruelties of the Danes: the account above given is from Mathew of Westminster.

^q Or Holland, the district in Lincolnshire so called.

rice, [Sept. 22,] and attacking the enemy, defeated them with the loss of three of their kings and a large number of common soldiers; and afterwards pursued them to the camp, where meeting with a resolute opposition, they withdrew from the fight, the armies being separated by the approaching darkness. This victory inspired the English with new courage; but unfortunately, in the course of the following night, the chiefs of the enemy, who had divided the country between them and gone out with their men to pillage, now all returned to the camp, by which their army completely outnumbered the Christians. The principal of these Danish kings were Guthrum and Bagseg, accompanied by the earls Hinguar and Hubba, and a large number of soldiers, bringing with them a multitude of captives and abundance of spoil. When the English heard of this great accession to the forces of the enemy, they were struck with alarm, and most of them took to flight. Some, however, resolving to conquer or die, early in the morning heard divine service and received the sacrament, after which they marched out to meet the enemy. Earl Algar, seeing how much his army was diminished in numbers, made the best disposition of his troops in his power, appointing Friar Toly with his five hundred men to head the right wing, and Earl Morcar and the Sheriff of Lincolnshire, with about five hundred men, to command the left, whilst he took his own station with his two Seneschals in the centre, which would enable him to assist either wing, if necessity should require. The Danes, who had now buried their three kings at a place called Laundon, but afterwards Trekyngtham, were exasperated at the loss which they had experienced, and fully determined to avenge the slain: two of their

kings and eight earls marched to attack the English, whilst the rest guarded the camp and captives. But the Christians, on account of the smallness of their number, drawing themselves up into one body, made with their shields a strong rampart, called by the ancients a *testudo*, against the arrows of the enemy, whilst they kept off the cavalry with their pikes. By this judicious arrangement they were enabled to keep their ground the whole day, and night coming on, they might without difficulty have maintained their defence, and escaped in safety; for the enemy had shot their arrows in vain, and their horses were now tired, and began to flag; yet by their own imprudence they lost all the advantages which they had gained. For the Danes, feigning a flight, seemed to quit the field; which the English no sooner perceived, than they broke their ranks, in spite of all their commanders could do or say to prevent them, and rushed forwards to the pursuit without order, and heedless of their leaders' commands. The Danes, seizing the opportunity, returned with speed to the attack, and slaughtered them, as if they had been a flock of sheep. Earl Algar and Friar Toly, seeing the total defeat of their army, withdrew with some soldiers to a rising ground, where they formed themselves into a circle, and for a long time resisted all the force and insults of the enemy: and at length, mounting over the dead bodies of the slain, and resolved to sell their lives as dearly as possible, they died honourably, covered with a multitude of wounds. None survived but a few young men of Sutton and Gedney, who, throwing away their arms, fled into a neighbouring wood, and by these means escaping from the battle, came the night following to Croyland abbey, where they related the defeat of the

Christians, and slaughter of all their men. This intelligence caused the greatest lamentation and fear: the abbat and monks, confounded at the news, resolved to keep with them only the elder monks and some small children, whose infirmity of age might tempt the enemy to shew mercy, and sent away all the younger brethren, together with the body of St. Guthlac, and the other relics, jewels, and charters, of the kings Ethelbald and Oslaf, belonging to the monastery, by water.

Among their treasures was a large silver table, the gift of king Wiglaf, which they threw together with ten chalices and other vessels into the fountain of the cloister, but the length of the table was so great, that, do what they would, one end of it always appeared above the water; and the monks seeing by the fires that the enemy were near at hand, were obliged to leave the table with the abbat, and proceed in their boat with the rest of the property, which they had secured, to the wood of Ankaring, in the neighbourhood of the island on which Croyland abbey was built. Here they remained four days with some hermits, one of whom was named Toret, being in number forty persons, ten of whom were priests, and thirty lay-brethren. Meanwhile the abbat, whose name was Theodore, assisted by two monks, conveyed the silver table out of the Church towards the north, and buried it so carefully, that it never afterwards could be found. They then clothed themselves in their vestments, and, entering the choir, chanted the services of the Hours, and went through all the Psalms of David; after which the abbat himself said the High Mass, attended by Elfget the deacon, Savin the subdeacon, and two boys, Egelred and Ulric, who carried the tapers. When the Mass was finished, and the abbat and his

attendants had communicated, the Danes burst into the Church, and their ferocious leader Osketyl with his own hand slew the venerable abbat upon the altar; his followers assaulted the rest of the brethren, who endeavoured in vain to escape out of the Church, but they were seized by their fierce assailants, and put to the torture, that they might be forced to reveal where their treasures were concealed. Asker the prior was examined in the vestry, and Lethwin the subprior in the refectory. The last was accompanied by a beautiful boy named Turgar, only ten years old, who, seeing his patron about to be put to death, entreated that he might be allowed to perish with him. But earl Sidroc the younger, taking compassion on the child, stripped off his cowl and monastic dress, and putting on him a Danish cloak, told him to keep near himself. In this manner that boy alone was saved, out of all the brethren, and as long as the Danes remained in the monastery, he had free leave to come in and go out without opposition on the part of any of them. All the monks were slain by their tormentors, who, in search of such treasures as they supposed were still concealed, broke into the tombs and monuments of the abbats and saints who had been buried in that monastery, and, disappointed in their expectations, collected the bodies into a heap, and burnt them with the monastery and all it contained to ashes. This took place on the 25th of September, which was the third day after they came to the abbey.

The next morning the Danes, with an immense quantity of booty, marched to Peterborough, then called Medeshamsted, where finding the gates barred, and all the people of the neighbouring country assembled to defend the Church, they assailed the walls on all sides

with their engines. At the second assault a breach was effected, and the barbarians rushed into the abbey; Lubba, a Dane, and brother to earl Hubba, was struck down with a stone in the gateway, and carried back almost dead by his companions into Hubba's tent. The earl, enraged beyond measure at this event, put to death with his own hand every one he met with wearing the monastic dress: his example was implicitly followed by his companions, who shewed no mercy to their opponents. The venerable abbat Edda and all his monks were slain: not one of them escaped alive, and Sidroc even thought it necessary to caution the boy Turgar, whom he had saved at Croyland, not to throw himself in Hubba's way, until his wrath had in some measure subsided. The altars in every part of the Church were thrown down, the monuments broken, and all the books and charters in the library were burnt; the relics of the saints were trodden under foot, and the monastery with its beautiful buildings reduced to a heap of ashes, which still smouldered a fortnight after the fire was first kindled!

From Peterborough the plunderers marched to Huntingdon, carrying with them the plunder which they had gathered. On their way they came to the river Nene, which the main body passed in safety; but as the two Sidrocs, who commanded the rear-guard, were crossing it, two of the waggons, loaded with booty of inestimable value, fell off the stone-bridge into the water, and were lost. Whilst the servants of the younger Sidroc were doing their utmost to draw out the waggons, and to save the property contained in them, the boy Turgar escaped into a wood which was close at hand, and reached Croyland early the next morning. Here he found the monks, who had retired

to Ancaring, when the Danes first approached, endeavouring by every means in their power to extinguish the flames, which were still preying on the monastery. They were delighted to see the boy safe and sound; but, when he told them how the abbat and monks had been murdered, and pointed out where their bodies were still lying, the tombs and monuments broken, and the holy volumes and bodies of the saints consumed together by the flames, they were overwhelmed with grief, and made the blackened walls echo with their lamentations. They repaired the buildings of the monastery by slow degrees, and consigned to Christian burial such bodies as could be discovered, but half a year or more elapsed before some of the corpses could be found. Herbert and Paulinus, two old monks, who had had their hands lopped off in the choir, besides suffering other severe bodily tortures, were now found lying dead in the Chapter-house. Grimketyl and Agamund, two monks who were more than a hundred years of age, had been slain in the Cloister, and their corpses were now found in the Locutory or Parlour. The boy Thurgar, who had witnessed the whole murderous scene with his own eyes, told them the history of each as the bodies were successively drawn forth from the rubbish. But we must leave the monks at Peterborough to repair their ruins^r, and follow the authors of the deed, who still pursued without tiring their course of blood and havoc.

^r This account of the ruinous march of the Danes from York is given almost in the very words of Ingulf, the historian of Croyland abbey. Matthew of Westminster says, that the abbey of Thorney and Ramesey were destroyed at the same time. The account given in the Peterborough Chronicle is copied from Ingulf; its text is more correct in many respects than that of either Gale or Savile.

The Danish marauders proceeded from Huntingdon towards the East, devastating the country as they went. Entering Cambridgeshire, they came to Ely, and destroyed its famous monastery, putting to death both men and women, monks and nuns, without mercy, and setting fire to the buildings after they had secured the plunder. They were now on the borders of East Anglia, whose sovereign Edmund, absorbed in his care for the interests of religion, seems to have taken no steps to provide against the storm which was approaching.

Concerning the invasion and conquest of East Anglia, the Chronicles in general give us but slender notices; and their brevity has been hardly compensated by the loquacity of the monks, who invariably indulge in details, whenever their own order is more than usually concerned in the events which they narrate. From the six earlier Chronicles we learn, that the army of the Danes, considerably increased in numbers by the arrival of reinforcements*, entered East Anglia, and fought a bloody battle with the inhabitants at Thetford, the English were defeated, and their king, Edmund, fell into the hands of the Danes, who tied him to a tree, and shot him to death with their arrows. This narrative, in the pages of Matthew of Westminster†, is expanded into the following legend, in continuation of the account of Berne the huntsman, as related in a preceding page of this work:

“The sons of Regner Lodbroc took with them

* Simeon alone of the six states this.

† The same account, at least in substance, is given by the earlier Chronicler John Brompton, but it is not so full as Matthew of Westminster's. Ingulf says, that earl Wolfketul commanded the East Anglians at the battle of Thetford.

Berne the huntsman, to guide them in their voyage. Assembling an army of twenty thousand men, they took ship, and sailed towards East Anglia, to take vengeance on king Edmund for their father's death ; but they were driven out of their course by contrary winds, and landed at Berwick on the Tweed in Scotland, where they began to ravage the country, and carrying death and desolation with them, they at length entered the kingdom of East Anglia.

“ Here they made an encampment at the village of Thetford, and put to death all they found there, whether men or women. At length the wicked tyrant Hinguar, when he had glutted his rage with the blood of his victims, called into his presence some of his captives, whose meanness of condition saved them from the sword, and asked them where their king Edmund was then residing. For he had heard by the mouth of fame that Edmund was a brave and warlike king, and that in stature and beauty of person no one could compare with him. For this reason he took care to destroy all the English he met with, that he might put it out of their king's power to collect a large army for the defence of his country. By these enquiries, that wicked robber learnt that the glorious king Edmund—soon to be a martyr—was residing at that time in a royal village named Heglesdune, near to a wood bearing the same name. Whereupon he privately summoned one of his soldiers, and commissioned him to go to king Edmund, and demand of him that he should divide between them his treasures and hereditary wealth, and retain the kingdom in vassalage to Hinguar. But in making this demand for money, the Danish chieftain acted a deceitful part, for it was the blood of the gentle king and not his money that he coveted. The soldier

hastened to king Edmund, and coming into his presence, addressed him in these words: 'The dreadful Hinguar, my master, and the invincible king of the Danes, has come to winter in this country. If you despise his power, you will be accounted unworthy to rule, or even to live!' Then the messenger delivered to the king the whole commission with which he was charged, and the pious king Edmund, groaning in spirit, and considering what answer he should make, summoned to him Humbert, bishop of Helmham, and thus addressed him: 'Humbert, servant of the living God, and half of my own life, behold the hostile barbarians are at hand, and they will soon destroy all that remains to us of our dear country, so that it shall be blotted out of the memory of those who come after us. Alas, I would that by my own death, the people who are under my charge might live! For the love of a temporal kingdom, or the emoluments of this present life, shall never induce me to submit to a heathen tyrant, when I have it in my power, by dying in arms for my people and my country, to become the standard-bearer of the Eternal King.' To whom the Bishop replied: 'Beloved king, whom do you hope to save out of the ruin of your country, unless you take the precaution to flee immediately? for these wicked traitors will soon be here, and they will endeavour to

^a "Abbo Floriacensis, who lived in the tenth century, and wrote the Life and Passion of St. Edmund, adds the following to the speech of Hinguar's messenger: Who are you that you should insolently dare to resist our power? The storm which roars over the ocean bends in submission to our oars, nor deters us from putting in force our enterprises. Neither the loud roar of the thunder, nor the lightning which darts across the sky, has ever injured us. Submit then with all your people to a master, whom even the elements obey."

destroy you and your people out of the land of the living.' 'This,' replied the gentle king, 'is what I desire above all things, that I may not survive my faithful people and dear friends, whom the bloody pirate has treacherously destroyed. Your suggestion casts a stain upon my reputation in arms, which has hitherto been free from censure. The King of Heaven is my witness, that no fear of the barbarians shall separate me, alive or dead, from the love of Christ.' Then turning to the Danish messenger, 'You,' said he, 'deserve death, because you are stained with the blood of my subjects: but I, in imitation of my Master Christ, do not fear to die for Him, if the occasion shall require. Return, therefore, at once to your master, and deliver to him my answer. The treasures, which the Divine clemency have given me, may be spoiled by the hand of power, but you shall never compel me to bow beneath your infidelity. It is honourable to defend to the last our liberties and the purity of our faith, nor shall I, if required, decline to die in their behalf. Persevere, therefore, in your barbarity, and slay the king, whose subjects you have already put to death; but the King of kings is looking down upon us, and He will transport me after death to reign with Him for ever in heaven.'

The barbarian messenger departed, and king Edmund summoned his soldiers to arms, exhorting them to die bravely for their religion and their country, and not to desert their standards, or to betray the common cause. At the instance, therefore, of bishop Humbert, the nobles, and his fellow-soldiers, the blessed king Edmund marched forth bravely, with all the troops he could muster, against the enemy; and coming up with them not far from the city of Thetford,

fought with them a severe battle, in which numbers on both sides were slain. For when the fight had lasted from the morning until the evening, and the field was deluged with the blood of the slain, the pious king Edmund not only grieved for the slaughter of his fellow-soldiers who were contending for their country and the faith of Jesus Christ, who, he was well aware, would receive the crown of martyrdom, but bitterly lamented also the deaths of the foreign infidels, who were hurried down suddenly to the gulf of hell. The pagans were the first to retreat from the scene of slaughter, and the sainted confessor of Christ, king Edmund, set out, accompanied by those of his fellow-soldiers who survived, to the royal town of Heglesdon, and came to a fixed determination in his own mind never again to fight against the barbarians; for he said that it would be necessary for him alone to die for his people, and not for the whole nation utterly to be destroyed.

“While Hingvar^u was grieving over the slaughter caused amongst his followers at Thetford, his brother Hubba, who had ravaged the whole of Mercia, came to him there with ten thousand men, and the two, uniting their forces to revenge themselves on the sainted king Edmund, struck their camp, and hastily marched to the town of Heglesdon, where he then was, and the tyrant Hingvar^u at once ordered the king and his followers to be surrounded, that not one of them might escape alive. Finding himself thus hemmed in by the enemy on all sides, St. Edmund, by the advice of Humbert, bishop of Helmham, fled to the church, in order to prove himself a member of Christ; and casting away the armour of this world, he put on that of heaven, and humbly prayed of the Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit, to grant him firmness in his passion. He was however cruelly dragged forth by those ministers of iniquity, bound, and in the same manner as Christ was led before Pilate the governor, so was Saint Edmund led before the wicked chief, thus following in the steps of him who was offered up a victim on our behalf; and by orders of the chief he was secured to a tree standing near, and flogged for a length of time, and subjected to various kinds of derision and mockery. This invincible champion, however, continued to call on Christ in mournful accents, which excited his torturers to madness, and at a given signal they aimed at him with their bows, piercing his body with arrows and other missiles, until there was not a vacant part of his body to admit of a fresh wound being inflicted; for like the hedgehog which is armed with thick quills in his skin, so was the body of this invincible king transfixed with arrows. At length this cruel murderer Hinguar, not being able to make St. Edmund recede from the faith of Christ and the confession of the Trinity, or to acquiesce in his wicked persuasions, gave orders to his executioner to cut the martyr's head off with his bloody sword; who accordingly, in the midst of the king's prayers and invocations of the name of Christ, mercilessly severed his head from his body at one blow, on the twentieth of November, and thus sent him to heaven, an acceptable burnt-offering, proved by the fire of suffering, and with the palm of victory and the crown of justice. Those ministers of the devil then, leaving the place, carried away the headless body of the martyr to a wood called Heglesdon, and threw it amidst the thick brambles; for it was the aim of those evil ones to prevent the body of the martyr from being consigned to the tomb in a proper manner with the

head by the Christians, of whom they had left a few survivors. Those wicked pirates, Hinguar and Hubba, had also learned, that their father Lodbroc had been killed in that wood some time before ; wherefore also, by the traitorous suggestion of Berne the huntsman, and wishing to retaliate upon the blessed martyr Edmund, they threw his head ignominiously away in that wood, and there left it to be devoured by the birds of the air and the beasts of the forest. Together with this most holy king, died also his inseparable companion, Humbert, bishop of Helmham, who had raised him to the throne of the kingdom, and who, being encouraged by the firmness of the invincible king, became a partaker of the heavenly kingdom together with him. The Pagans, after having thus sent this most blessed king to the regions of heaven, passed the winter in that district amid much boasting and exultation, driving away the few natives who had escaped the late slaughter.

“ When the brothers Hinguar and Hubba had passed a great part of the winter, after the martyrdom of the sainted king Edmund in the country of the East-Anglians, indulging in rapine and pillage, one of the most powerful of the Danish kings, named Gytro, came to spend the rest of the winter with the aforesaid brothers ; and when the spring arrived, all the Pagans left East-Anglia together. At hearing this, the Christians rushed forth from their hiding places in all quarters, and endeavoured to find the head of the blessed king Edmund, for the purpose of uniting it to his body, and consigning it entire to the tomb with royal ceremonies, and whilst all joined in the work with like eagerness, and were diligently traversing the woods in search of the martyr’s head, an event occurred won-

derful to relate, and unheard of for many ages; for when the different parties were scattered in the search amongst the trees and bushes, and one cried out in their country's language, 'Where art thou? Where art thou?' the martyr's head replied in the same language, 'Here! Here!' nor did it cease repeating the cry, till it had brought all the parties to the place where it lay; and on their arriving there, they discovered a huge frightful-looking wolf, who held the sacred head in its paws, and kept watch over the sainted martyr. The men then boldly took the head, and after pouring forth their praises to God, carried it away, followed by the wolf to the place of burial; they then joined the head to the body, and placed the two united parts together in a proper tomb, after which the wolf returned to his haunts in the forest. At this same place, a small Church of very poor structure was built by his faithful followers, where during many years afterwards the holy body reposed.

"This most blessed king and martyr Edmund suffered in the year of grace 870, in the twenty-ninth year of his age, and the sixteenth of his reign, on Monday, the 20th of November*, the third indiction, and the moon being twenty-two days old.

"After the lapse of many years, when the flames of war were altogether extinguished, the piety of the Christians began to breathe freely, and, when many miracles had been performed in the place where the martyr's body reposed, and which is now called Hoxon by the inhabitants, they built a large church in a royal

* "16 Kal. Decembris," in the text of M. of Westminster, page 165, is evidently a misprint; for in page 164 we find "12 cal. Decemb." Florence of Worcester says, "Indictione II, die Dominico," which applies to the year 869.

town called in the English tongue 'Bedrigsworth,' or 'Bedrig's Court,' i. e. 'the dwelling of Bedric,' and transferred thither the body of the holy martyr with great rejoicings. Here again a wonderful event occurred; for when all expected, from the length of time that had elapsed, to find the much-prized body of the martyr rotten, they found it entire and uninjured; and not only was the head reunited to the body, but not a sign of a wound or scar appeared in it. Thus was this martyr, worthy of God, translated to the aforesaid place, in appearance like a living man, with the symbol of martyrdom appearing round his neck like a crimson thread[†], as has been generally declared by a certain woman of blessed memory, named Oswen, who, for many years, after the tomb of the blessed martyr was destroyed, employed herself at his holy sepulchre in prayer and fasting, cutting his hair and paring his nails at the Lord's Supper, and all these things she used carefully to collect and place in a jar on the altar of that Church, where they are preserved with all due reverence to this very day."

[†] Now called St. Edmundsbury.

[‡] The same story is told of Thomas à Becket, and, no doubt, of many other martyrs.

CHAP. X.

THE DANES ENTER WESSEX, AND FORTIFY A CAMP AT READING—
BATTLE OF ENGLEFIELD GREEN, IN WHICH THE DANES ARE
DEFEATED—BATTLE OF READING, IN WHICH THE ENGLISH ARE
DEFEATED—BATTLE OF ASHDOWN, IN WHICH THE DANES ARE
DEFEATED—BATTLE OF BASING, IN WHICH THE ENGLISH ARE
DEFEATED—BATTLE OF MERTON, IN WHICH THE ENGLISH ARE
DEFEATED—DEATH OF KING ETHELRED, APR. 23, A.D. 871.

THE defeat and cruel death of Edmund laid the kingdom of East Anglia at the feet of the invaders. Edwold, brother to the murdered king, resigning all the pleasures of the world and the hopes of succeeding to a crown, took refuge in Dorsetshire, where he spent the remainder of his days as a hermit, eating bread alone, and drinking water from the spring. Meanwhile the country, which his brother had ruled, was reduced to a Danish province, and received Guthrum, one of the Danish chiefs, for its king^a. The terrible Hinguar returned with his brother Hubba^b into North-

^a Brompton.

^b Brompton describes Hubba as having been left in Northumberland, when his brother Hinguar invaded Mercia: yet he occurs among the chiefs who assaulted and burnt Peterborough Abbey. Ethelwerd says, that Ivar, a Danish king, died in 870: [see also Adam Bremen. lib. i.] Modern writers have supposed Ivar to be the same as Hinguar; but, according to Regnar Lodbroc's Saga, [Rafu, Nord. Kæmpe-Hist. Bd. i. p. 147.] Ivar "was his brother: he died in 872. Ingvar appears again in England in 877. . . . According to Wallingford, (Gale, i. p. 535.) whose authority is of little weight.

umberland, which also now became a Danish kingdom under the brothers, though our information is too limited to enable us to ascertain the mode by which that extensive province was governed.

It was now the evident purpose of the Danes not to pillage, but to conquer, and to reduce into perpetual subjection the several states of England. It must excite the surprise of the reader, that no combination was made to resist an enemy, whose success would be disastrous to all alike. But it is not difficult to find good reasons why such a combination was not formed. From the account which Abbo of Fleury^c gives of East Anglia in the tenth century, it appears to have been in fact almost as distinctly separated from the rest of England, as our island is at this day separated from France. On the East and South, it was washed by the German ocean: its northern frontier was divided from Lincolnshire by immense marshes, a hundred miles in extent, whilst on the West it was protected by a mound of great height and breadth, effectually cutting it off from the communication which has in later times connected Norfolk and Suffolk with the rest of the island. Northumbria, owing to its distant position, was never brought into close connection with Wessex, whose kings never interfered in the affairs of so remote a province. Mercia alone had received effectual succour

Inguar was slain by the Northumbrians. It is remarkable that Hermann Corner, in his Chronicle, a. 868, has interpolated the passage, "Inguar . . . non diu regnavit, quia propter suam improbitatem a suis interfectus est, non relinquens post se semen." THORPE's Lappenberg, vol. ii. p. 40, note.

^c See the Cotton MS. Tib. B. 2. p. 3. as quoted by Turner, Hist. of England, vol. ii. p. 521.

from Ethelred and Alfred against the Danes, and she had since suffered the indignity of seeing her provinces ravaged, her monasteries destroyed, and the neighbouring state of East Anglia conquered: yet no alliance was made to oppose the formidable foe that was at hand: on the contrary, king Burrhed, who had lately been engaged in hostilities with the Britons on his western frontier, desisting from that war, came to London, not to defend his own territories from the Danes, but to spoil the lands of the unhappy monks, who had lately suffered so grievously from those marauders: we read that he took into his own possession the isle of Ely, with the whole of the lands between Stamford, Huntingdon, and Wisbeach, belonging to the Church of Peterborough, and distributed the more remote districts among his soldiers. The same spoliation was used towards other churches, in particular the abbey of Croyland, where nothing was left to the monks but their island, and the marshes in which it stood^d. Such were the discords, jealousies, and want of harmony existing at this time between the Anglo-Saxon kings; and it is not to be regretted, that they learnt by the teaching of adversity, how hard a task it is for a disunited people to retrieve the loss of its independence, which by unity and patriotism they might so easily have defended.

Of the Danish chiefs who first conducted this invading army, Guthrum, Hinguar, and Hubba, had now secured to themselves large possessions in England. Wessex alone, of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, was free from their ravages, and the remaining Danish kings, Halfdene and Bagseg, early in the year 871

^d Peterborough Chronicle and Ingulf.

turned their arms against it. Leaving East Anglia*, they speedily entered Berkshire, and surprised Reading, which they fortified, constructing a rampart between the rivers Thames and Kennet. On the third day after their arrival, leaving part of their number to carry on this work, the rest of them marched out under the command of their earls, to plunder. But Ethelwolf, alderman of Berkshire, who eleven years before had defeated a party of Danes when they landed in Sussex†, was still at his post in the hour of danger. Perceiving the number of the enemy, he exhorted his men to take courage. "The enemy outnumbers us," said he, "but let us despise their superiority of number. We have Christ for our leader, and He is stronger than they are."

These words gave confidence to his soldiers, who met the enemy at Englefield, and routed them after a battle, in which many fell on both sides. Among the slain was Sidroc, one of their earls: the residue of the Danes saved themselves by flight, and the English remained masters of the field‡, an omen of the final issue of the war, of which this was the commencement, and which Alfred, after a hundred battles, was destined to bring to a close, by the total defeat and subjugation of the invading foe.

Whilst the brave Ethelwolf was vindicating the honour of his country at Englefield, king Ethelred, and his brother Alfred, who at the end of 870 had made a journey to Canterbury to appoint a new arch-

* Henry of Huntingdon says, that the Danish army, on leaving East Anglia, was divided into several bodies in consequence of their numbers, and marched separately.

† See page 70.

‡ Sax. Ch. Ass. Eth. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

bishop, and settle the affairs of that Church^b, were not remiss in preparing to meet the invaders. Summoned by the rapid march of the enemy, and their sudden occupation of Reading, the gallant princes hastened thither with the men of Wessex, and attacking the enemy, defeated and cut to pieces all whom they found outside the fortifications. But the Danes sallying in numbers from the camp renewed the battle, and after much fighting, the English retreated, leaving the brave alderman, Ethelwolf, dead upon the fieldⁱ.

^b The account of this matter, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, is as follows: "The same year died Archbishop Ceolnoth. Then went Ethelred and Alfred his brother, and took Ethelred, bishop of Wiltshire, and appointed him archbishop of Canterbury, because he had formerly been a monk in the monastery of Canterbury. As soon as Ethelred arrived and was established in his archbishopric, he began to consider how he might expel the clerks, whom archbishop Ceolnoth had placed in that Church. The occasion of their being placed there was this. The first year of Ceolnoth's prelacy there was so great a mortality, that of all the monks whom he found there at first, no more than five survived. For which cause, being unable suddenly to procure enough monks to perform the service of the Church, he commanded his chaplains, and also some priests of the villages which belonged to himself, to assist the few monks who survived, in discharge of Christ's service, until God should restore peace to the land. For at this time the country was distressed by frequent battles, so that the archbishop could not effect his wishes, for there was warfare and sorrow all his time throughout England; and the clerks remained with the monks. But the Church never was without monks, who always had superiority over the priests. And the archbishop reflected in his own mind, and also said to those who were near him: "As soon as God shall give peace in this land, either these priests shall become monks, or I will find some other monks to place in this Church who shall be enough to do the whole service themselves: for God knows that I cannot do otherwise. Neither was his successor Ethelred able, at this time, to effect the same object."

ⁱ Sax. Ch. Asser, Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

Stung with the feeling of dishonour at this repulse, the Anglo-Saxon princes in an incredibly short space of time were again in a condition to take the field. The Danes had drawn their forces to a place called Ashdown, so named either from a single tree, or from a wood of Ash-trees, which stood there on the downs^k. On the fourth day after the attack on the Danish camp at Reading, the English army, commanded by its princes, was here drawn up in hostile array against them. The Danish forces were divided into two bodies, one of which was commanded by the two kings, Hafdene and Bagseg, the other by the earls Sidroc, Harald, and the rest. Ethelred, observing

^k It is by no means agreed, among modern writers, where the site of the battle is to be placed. Leland [MS. Collect. vol. i. f. 199. a.] and Whitaker, p. 272, fix it at Aston in Berkshire. Dr. Kennett, however, [Parochial Antiq. p. 35.] says Ashendon in the forest of Bernwood, Buckinghamshire. Dr. Talbot seemed to be of opinion, from some MS. notes preserved in Leland's MSS. Collect. [vol. iii. f. 194. b.] that Ashdown forest in Sussex was meant. There is also a place bearing a similar name, Assenton near Henley in Oxfordshire. Dr. Lingard, [Hist. Eng. vol. i. p. 160.] observes, "As the Saxon Chronicle says, that it lay in the road from Wallingford to Cuckhamsley hill, Gibson was probably right when he fixed it at Aston." Turner [p. 529.] seems to agree with this view of the question, adding, however, that Dr. Wise, in his letter to Dr. Mead, concerning some antiquities in Berkshire, printed 1738, contends, that the famous white horse on the hill was made to commemorate this victory. He says, "I take Escesdune to mean that ridge of hills from Letcombe and thereabouts, going on to Wiltshire, and overlooking the vale with the town in it. The town formerly called Ayshesdown, is now called Ashbury; the old name is still preserved hereabouts, the downs being called by the shepherds, Ashdown; and about a mile southward from Ashbury, is Ashdown Park." p. 20. I am inclined to accede to the opinion of Dr. Wise, which is supported by some interesting topographical remains, for which see Gough's Camden, vol. i. p. 221. There is also a popular tradition concerning the battle in the neighbourhood of Ashdown.

this disposition of the enemy, divided his army also into two bodies, one of which with Alfred at its head was destined to attack the earls, whilst himself at the head of the second division should try the chance of battle against the Danish kings. The engagement began early in the morning, whilst Ethelred was still in his tent, hearing mass, for the division which Alfred commanded, after waiting some time for the king to join them, at length, provoked by the bravadoes of the enemy, or fired with ambition to gain the victory without the assistance of their comrades, advanced against the foe, and surmounting the inequality of the ground—for the Danes were posted advantageously on an eminence—commenced a severe and well-contested encounter. But the superiority of numbers and the impediments of the ascent were too great for the young prince, who perhaps in this single instance, being only twenty-two years old, may have shewn more valour than discretion in thus single-handed attacking the whole force of the enemy. His men began to waver, and at length retreated: this repulse would have ended in a total rout, if at this critical juncture the other half of the army had not come to their succour. It is of course impossible at this distance of time to explain why the issue of the battle and the safety of the kingdom were put into jeopardy by this unwise division of the English army. All the Chroniclers agree that Ethelred was resolved not to enter the field until he had finished his devotions, saying, that while he lived no worldly occasion should make him forsake the service of God; but whether this was a device to inspire a superstitious soldiery with courage, or proceeded from the pious impulse of his own breast, we cannot now hope to determine. It may have been

invented afterwards as a palliation for neglect, or to conceal the real cause of the danger to which one half of the army had been exposed in the battle. The timely arrival of Ethelred gave a favourable turn to the engagement: Alfred's troops rallied, and the conquest was renewed. "There was," says Asser, "on the field of battle, a single thorn-tree, of stunted growth, but we have ourselves never seen it. Around this tree the opposing armies closed with loud shouts, the one party pursuing their wicked course, the other fighting for their lives, their dearest ties, and their country." When both parties had for a long time maintained the conflict, the Danes were repulsed: many of them were slain on the field of battle, and when evening was closed in, the survivors saved themselves by flight¹. This was the greatest battle which had yet been fought in Wessex, and it was attended with severe loss to the Danes: Bagseg, one of their kings^m, and the earls, Sidroc the youngerⁿ, Osbern, Frena, and Harold, were among the slain, and Asser, the biographer of Alfred, who says that he had his account of Alfred's impetuous charge in this battle from those who were present, tells us also, that many thousands of the Danes perished, and those who escaped were pursued

¹ Saxon Chron. Asser, Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

^m Brompton and Matthew of Westminster say, that both the Danish kings were slain.

ⁿ All the six Chroniclers state, that the two Sidrocs were both slain in this battle, yet the Saxon Chron. and Henry of Huntingdon had both recorded the death of the elder Sidroc at the battle of Englefield: the other four Chroniclers do not name the earl who was slain at the former battle. On the other hand, one MS. of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle [Cotton, Tib. B. iv.] mentions only Sidroc the younger as slain in the battle of Ashdown.

by the victorious English over the whole breadth of the plains of Ashdown.

From the slender accounts which we find in the original writers of the transactions of this period, it is impossible to determine whether the victory at Ashdown is to be attributed to Alfred or to the king. An old poet, as Spelman has remarked*, "looking nearer into the deeds of either than we are now able to do, has ascribed the victory to Alfred;" but, beyond the success gained on the field of battle, it produced no important result: fourteen days after, the Danes again met the English at Basing, and after a long contest gained the victory, which, however, did them little good; for the Chronicler Ethelwerd consoles his readers for the defeat of the English with the assurance, that the enemy gained no booty from their victory. Within two months another battle took place at Merton^p; both sides fought with the utmost

* The lines are these,

Redingum nitidum, texendis nobile pannis.
Hoc docet Alfredi nostri victricia signa,
Bagsegi cædem, calcata cadavera Dani,
Utque superfuso maduerunt sanguine campi.

as found in Gough's Camden, v. i. p. 217. but neither Spelman nor Camden tell us who is their author.

^p The locality of this battle is uncertain. According to Dr. Lingard, it is Morton in Berkshire; there being much confusion in ancient MSS. between the letters e and o. Such appears to be the opinion of Turner, "because the Chronicle of Melrose, 144, places the battle at Reading; and, according to the map, Morton hundred joins Reading, and contains both North Merton and South Merton." Spelman makes it out to be Merden near Devizes in Wiltshire, to which opinion Hearne adds this note: "Some say Merton in Surrey. See the account of places at the end of Dr. Gibson's edition of the Saxon Annals. Others Mertune in Oxfordshire, particularly Dr. Plot, [Nat. Hist. of Oxfordshire, cap. x. §. 77.] and Dr. Kennett,

bravery, and after a long contest the English were repulsed, and the Danes remained masters of the field^a. Edmund, bishop of Salisbury, was slain in this battle^r, and was afterwards buried at Keynsham in Wiltshire^s. At this time the army of the Danes was augmented by a large reinforcement from the Baltic, and thus became a match for any force that the English could bring into the field against them^t. Another event, also, now happened, which gave the Danes a still greater advantage over the English. King Ethelred, having "bravely, honourably, and with good repute, governed his kingdom five years, through much tribulation," died on the 23d of April, A.D. 871, and was buried in Wimbourne Minster^u.

[Parochial Antiq. p. 36.] who lay great stress upon a Danish spur found here, which is now to be seen in the Physic-school at Oxford; but, since this is but a very indifferent argument, (there having been several of these spurs found in other places of England,) and since most of our historians place it in Wilts, I cannot very readily yield to either, especially the latter of these opinions." p. 43.

^a Sax. Ch. Etheld. Flor. Hunt.

^r Sax. Ethel. Hunt.

^s Ethel.

^t Asser omits to notice the battle of Merton, so that the reinforcement falls, according to him, immediately after the battle of Basing. This has led Lappenberg to place the reinforcement before the battle of Merton, which is an error.

^u Florence alone gives the date of his death: the other Chroniclers say, after Easter, which in 871 fell on April 15. Hearne in a note to Spelman, p. 43, says, that Ethelred died at Wittingham, and that before the civil wars there was at Wimbourne, the place of his burial, a plate bearing this inscription: "*In hoc loco quiescit corpus Sancti Etheldredi regis West-Saxonum, Martyris, qui anno Domini DCCCLXXII, xxiii die Aprilis, per manus Danorum paganorum occubuit.*"

Modern writers state, that Ethelred died of the wounds which he had received in the battle of Merton: if there is authority for this in the original writers, it has escaped all my endeavours to find it.

CHAP. XI.

VIEW OF THE STATE OF ENGLAND AT THE TIME OF ALFRED'S ACCESSION IN 871—BATTLE OF WILTON—NINE BATTLES IN THE YEAR 871—IN 872 THE DANES LEAVE WESSEX AND OCCUPY LONDON—IN 873 THEY ENTER LINCOLNSHIRE—IN 874 THEY ENTER MERCA, EXPEL BURRHED, AND MAKE CEOLWULF KING—IN 875 THEY FLUNDER THE NORTHUMBRIANS, THE PICTS, AND THE STRATHCLYDE BRITONS.

IF I had taken in hand to write the life and reign of any of our kings who have lived since the full growth and consistency of the Crown, or since the general spread of European civilization has supplied ample materials for the pen of the biographer and the historian, it would have been only necessary to record the death of the preceding sovereign, and to proceed at once to recount the actions of his successor^a. The reader's general knowledge of the history of those times would have enabled him at once to follow the author into the very middle of the events which he had undertaken to relate, without tracing back the slender thread of a narrative which owes its consistency principally to its length. But as it is my object to illustrate the life and times of a King who lived a thousand years ago, long before the present tree of European civilization had blossomed, when the storm occasioned by the disruption of the Roman empire was still heaving and swelling over all the civilized world, and the

^a These observations are mostly taken from Spelman's Introduction to his Life of Alfred.

powerful empire to which we belong was not advanced beyond its embryo state, it was absolutely necessary to cast our eyes over the condition of the country, as it existed before the birth of Alfred; and to pass in review the events, as they are feebly told us by the Chroniclers, until the time when he succeeded to the throne, and saved it probably, at a great crisis, from sinking back into the barbarism, from which it was slowly emerging. When the course lies over a range of country so wild and cheerless, and so far out of the beaten track, the writer as well as the reader must find advantage in taking notice of the slightest landmark, to rectify the errors into which they continually will fall. We may regard the history of those early times in the same light as we view the huge and disjointed bones of gigantic monsters, which are occasionally found buried beneath the surface of the earth. Taken individually, they tell us no story, and are no more than misshapen lumps of earth; but when they are brought together and subjected to the examination which comparative anatomy supplies, they come out in a new light, and overwhelm the imagination by the gigantic pictures of antiquity which they bring before us.

We must also remember, that in a political point of view the history of times so remote cannot be fairly considered, unless we remove from our minds all that bias which modern manners are calculated to produce. On this subject, the observations of Sir John Spelman seem so judicious, that I shall make no apology for introducing them to the reader's attention.

"We must not expect such a solemn and steady management of affairs then, as now in a full-grown state, furnished with the ministry of all her necessary members: neither must we attribute so little to the

person of Alfred, (the prince whose life we here endeavour to collect,) as to judge the actions no otherwise his, than as the actions of states are ordinarily ascribed to the prince their head. Besides, we must know, that the war itself (which at this time was the whole affair) moved not on either side with that design, nor yet with so deliberate advice, as at this day, we know, it is necessary that it must do. The policies^b and cunning of the former ages were, through the barbarism that generally overran all Europe, long before this time buried. And, though by the benefit of letters they have been again revived to us, yet were they but little known, until the discovery of printing (long time after this) divulged them. So as the world (at the time we speak of) was from her own actions to get again experience, whence for after ages she might draw conclusions to hold as rules and principles of her proceedings; but unfurnished of them for the present, their business went an open and a simple way: in which as necessity (for the most part) did advise them, so fortune generally did determine of the event.

“There was then but little correspondence with foreign parts, indeed no great intelligence of either them or their affairs; whereby it often happened that an unexpected enemy was encountered by an unprepared people, infinite numbers were to be resisted by

^b “Though, through barbarism, the policies of former ages were unknown at this time; yet the Saxons used a great deal of art in their wars, as appears from the relations given by Witichind, [Annal. Saxon. p. 1. ed. Franc. 1621. fol.] and several other authors: which seem the rather to be credited, because the German nation (of which the Saxons were a part) was never wholly conquered by the Romans, as were Gallia, Spain, &c.”

a few and them taken on a sudden, continual new supplies of assailants, sustained by the indefatigable valour and industry of the same defendants, not otherwise provided than necessity and the present advice of the commander taught them. To say the truth, it cannot properly be termed a war, but rather a continual and universal rage of misery that the times brought forth, through the spoil and rapine of a barbarous and cruel people, who, being as destitute of faith and honour as of humanity and religion, followed no other rule of their proceeding, than as their licentious appetite did lead; naturally false and fierce, bred in hardness, and put upon necessities, unsatiably greedy of the booty that was before them, and accordingly their assaults every where, and the continuance of them, (at least in expectation,) perpetual. No truce, no peace, (the common respites or periods of an honourable war,) but only when an overthrow had rendered them too weak without new supplies to assail, or when a prosperous depredation had awhile delayed the appetite of their insatiable covetousness. And then, although (as to the form) they often came unto the conclusion of a peace, yet were they but peaces in name and not in deed, the barbarous enemy never suffering himself in any thing to be restrained, but by the want of present will or power^c."

During the life of Ethelred, the two brothers maintained the independence of Wessex, and, though several times defeated, still presented a formidable opposition to the Danes, when all the subordinate monarchies of England had been reduced to subjection. By the death of Ethelred, the sovereignty

^c Spel. Life of Alfred, by Hearne, p. 2.

fell into the hands of Alfred alone, for the children^d, whom his brother left behind him, were too young to oppose, or to guide the reins of government in a country distracted by war, and almost on the point of dissolution. There was however short time for deliberation: the enemy were not only at their gates, but had just defeated the English at Merton, and by large reinforcements recently received, were become a just cause of alarm to their enemies. In this situation of affairs, and considering the acknowledged part which Alfred had already played whilst secondary^e in authority to his brother, it is not likely that the slightest reference was made either by him or by the people to the intentions of his father Ethelwolf^f, or to any

^d Ethelwold and Ethelm, sons of Ethelred, occur in Alfred's will. See Appendix. The former of these laid claim to the throne at the death of Alfred, and finding his claim overruled, fled to the North, where he afterwards perished in battle.

^e "Qui usque ad id temporis viventibus fratribus suis secundarius fuerat," are the words of Asser, which seem to imply no more than that Alfred was in a subordinate station during the lives of his three brothers, and not that he possessed any authority as a tributary or provincial king.

^f I consider the will of King Alfred, which is to be found at the end of this volume, to apply, not to the kingdom and royal demesnes, but to the private family-property of the kings of Wessex. Spelman also seems to have entertained the same opinion. His words are as follows: "Æthelred being dead, it was now Ælfred's turn to succeed, both by the will of Æthelwolf their father, and likewise by the appointment of the last king Æthelred. For before that Æthelred came to the crown, there had been a treaty between him and Ælfred concerning their two fortunes. And Æthelred, in the presence of divers of the nobility, (acknowledging Ælfred's right in certain demesnes left him by his father, which were then, it seems, withholden from him,) gave his faithful word, that if ever he came to be king, he would not only permit Ælfred quietly to enjoy the lands bequeathed him, but further would make him sharer with

appointment which his brother Ethelred might recently have declared in his favour. The Saxons, at this time, had no settled rule of succession, and if practically the title, wealth, or honours of the deceased passed, consistently with natural propriety, to his kindred, this was a restriction of the widest interpretation, and included not only his children, but his brothers, cousins, and nephews, all of whom might take advantage of circumstances, and occupy the throne, if by their superior abilities, or the power of their sword, they were able to maintain it. It was imperative on the nobles of Wessex to act with speed and promptness; neither was it possible for Alfred to take long time for consideration. Yet the circumstances were of such a nature, that little advantage seemed likely to accrue to him from the more elevated position to which he was now invited. The crown, which should have made him satisfaction for all that he had done and suffered under his brothers, was now in a tattered condition, and liable at the first shaking to be rent in pieces. The election of both nobles and bishops, and

himself of all such territories as with his help he should at any time recover from the enemy. Yet afterwards, when the crown fell unto Æthelred, and that with Ælfred's assistance he had got divers pieces to the crown, being then demanded by Ælfred to perform the agreement, Æthelred refused, alleging reasons that he could break nothing of what he had, but, as he kept all entire, so at his death he would (if Ælfred survived) leave all entirely to him. And Ælfred, though still delayed in his right, yet contenting himself, did nevertheless faithfully assist Æthelred in all occasions of the kingdom, so long as Æthelred lived: but when, at his death, the crown should have made Ælfred satisfaction for all his sufferings under his several brothers, that, mightily shaken, and in present danger to be rent to pieces, fell as short in performing the long-expected recompense as his brother's promises had formerly done." P. 44.

the consent of the whole people, tendered the crown of Wessex to Alfred, who justly hesitated to undertake the arduous duties by which the office was accompanied; but the necessity was too pressing, the young prince, hardly twenty-two years old, bowed to the general wish, and, preferring the good of his country before the gratification of his own will, accepted the sovereignty with all the responsibility which it imposed upon him. And let no one think that the task, which he so readily undertook, was one which permitted him to affect reserve, whilst secret triumph was in his heart.

If the power and dignity of Wessex had been enlarged, with unprecedented rapidity, by Egbert his grandfather, it had been more lately so checked in its growth by the Danish invaders, whilst all the adjacent and subordinate states were annihilated, that it must henceforth stand alone to meet the rude shocks which the increasing multitudes of the enemy would inflict; to uphold its shattered condition, an able man must be seated on the throne, who shall be competent, not only to determine on public measures in the cabinet, but to execute them in the field; a skilful general, whom the Anglo-Saxon soldiery might look up to with confidence, and put forth that indomitable perseverance of character which marks both themselves and their descendants, with a fair chance of rescuing their country from the atrocious slavery which was impending. All eyes were therefore turned upon Alfred, with the heartfelt wish that he might undertake to be their king; but though he acceded to their request, he could view it in no other light than as a diversion from the studies and occupations in which he would willingly have passed his life. It was, in fact, to him a compact of broils and battles, for the kingdom which was offered

to him, was rather to be won afterwards by the valour of his sword than secured to him by the favour and election of the people, and the enterprise of recovering it out of the weak state in which it now was, seemed to all appearances to furnish no probable mode by which it could be effected. In spite, however, of these difficulties, Alfred “by God’s permission,”—in the words of his biographer Asser—“undertook the government of the whole kingdom, amid the acclamations of all the people[§]; and, if he had chosen, he might have done so before, whilst his brother before named was still alive; for in wisdom and other qualities he surpassed all his brothers, and, moreover, was warlike and victorious in all his wars. And, when he had reigned one month, *almost against his will*,—for he did not think he could alone sustain the multitude and ferocity of the Pagans, though even during his brothers’ lives he had borne the woes of many,—he fought a battle with a few men, and on very unequal terms, against all the army of the Pagans, at a hill called Wilton, on the south side of the river Wily, from which river the whole of that district is named, and, after a long and fierce engagement, the Pagans, seeing the danger they were in, and no longer able to bear the attack of their enemies, turned their backs and fled. But, O shame to say! they deceived their too audacious pursuers, and

[§] Spelman, [p. 45.] quoting Chron. MS. de regibus Angliæ in man. illust. com. Arundel, says that Alfred was crowned a second time at Winchester; to which Dr. Lingard adds, that the Archbishop of Canterbury performed the ceremony. The Archbishop probably did so, but the original Chroniclers make no mention of the fact. This is a very inoffensive instance of the latitude to which modern writers indulge their imagination, in enlarging the simple narrative which the old Chroniclers have left us.

again rallying, gained the victory. Let no one be surprised that the Christians had but a small number of men^b, for the Saxons had been worn out by eight battles in one year against the Pagans, of whom they had slain one king, nine dukes, and innumerable troops of soldiers, besides endless skirmishes, both by night and by day, in which Alfred and all his chiefs, with their men, and several of his ministers, were engaged without rest or cessation against the Pagans. How many thousands fell in these numberless skirmishes, God only knows, over and above those who were slain in the eight battles above mentioned. In the same year the Saxons made peaceⁱ with the Pagans, on condition that they should take their departure; and they did so."

The year 872 was, however, commenced before the

^b Ethelwerd also attributes the repulse of the English at Wilton to the smallness of the English army, occasioned, he says, by the absence of the king, who was occupied with the funeral of his brother. But as the battle of Wilton was fought nearly a month after Ethelred's death, the funeral had probably been completed long before; for they would hardly have kept the corpse so long.

ⁱ Dr. Lingard says, that Alfred induced the Danes, "probably by the offer of a valuable present," to withdraw out of his dominions. On the other hand, Rapin makes Alfred to have augmented his army with such incredible speed after the battle of Wilton, that he overawed the Danes, and compelled them to offer terms, which he, knowing that discretion is the better part of valour, readily accepted. This seems also to be Spelman's view. "What was the execution," says he, "then (*i. e. in the battle of Wilton*) done by the Danes, appeareth not, but the overthrow they gave was, it seems, not very great; and, though they were reputed to have the better title to the victory, yet might it well enough be a question whose indeed it was. For, as Alfred carried the matter, he found the means to bring the victors to the conclusion of a peace, and upon such terms as that they themselves should, notwithstanding their victory, forthwith withdraw and depart out of his dominion." LIFE OF ALFRED, p. 46.

Danes left Wessex, agreeably to their engagement; marching to London, which was on the frontiers of both kingdoms, they halted there, perhaps uncertain whether to enter Mercia, or, in breach of their faith, again after an interval to fall back upon Wessex. The anxiety of Burrhed, king of Mercia, anticipated the decision of his enemies. He gave way to his momentary alarm, and made a truce with the invaders, of such a nature that it could not possibly be lasting. A payment of gold was tendered to secure what can only be secured by the sword, and the fierceness of the invading hosts was once more turned aside from the fertile lands of Mercia^k. In 873,—for the Chroniclers delight thus to throw their plain narratives into the useful form of annals—Halldene, quitting London, marched with his banditti to Turksey in Lincolnshire, where the Mercians renewed their armistice, and perhaps again tendered a sum of money, on condition that Mercia should be spared^l.

The hopes, however, which these treatises inspired, were brief and fallacious. It was seldom that the faith of the Danes lasted a year at the utmost, and, if we reflect on the numerous circumstances which, in so disordered a condition of things, may continually arise, leading to the infraction of agreements, it is more surprising that the king of Mercia should have entered into a treaty, than that his enemies should have infringed

^k “*Stipendiaque statuunt*” is the phrase of Ethelwerd. Though unsupported by the other five earlier Chroniclers, it is to be feared that Ethelwerd has too truly described the nature of the armistice.

^l Simeon and Asser describe Lindsay as belonging to Northumberland at this time: perhaps it had been taken possession of by the Danes, during their former invasion, and annexed to Northumberland, which was now become a Danish kingdom.

it. The other southern states were perhaps, in their devastated condition, unable to maintain Halfden's army, much less to provide them with the plunder which they so eagerly sought. If this be the case, it was difficult to withhold a hungry army from invading a province which held out to them the hope both of food and plunder. The sequel shall be told in the words of Asser, and of Ingulf, who, about two hundred years after, may have found among the records of Croyland abbey some authentic documents concerning the ruin that fell upon his country. "The Pagans returned to Mercia in 874, and wintering at Repton, utterly destroyed that famous monastery, the hallowed burial-place of the Mercian kings. Burrhed, the king, had reigned two and twenty years to see the whole of England filled by the barbarians with rapine and slaughter. In this state of things, either despairing of being able to conquer his enemies, or shrinking from the labyrinth of toil and labour which lay before him, he abandoned the sovereignty, and went to Rome, where he died a few days after his arrival, and was buried in the school of the English^m. His wife followed his example; but she died on her way to Rome, and was buried in Ticinoⁿ. The Pagans, after Burrhed's expulsion, subjected the whole kingdom of the Mercians to their dominion; but by a most miserable arrangement, gave it into the custody of a foolish man, named Ceolwulf, one of the king's

^m "In St. Mary's Church," Sax. Ch. and Asser.

ⁿ Ingulf, from whom this paragraph is taken, says, that Alfred was in his retreat at Athelney in 874, when Burrhed abdicated the throne. This is an error; Alfred did not retreat to Athelney until four years afterwards.

ministers^o, on condition that he should restore it to them whenever they should wish to have it again; and, to guarantee this agreement, he gave them hostages, and swore that he would not oppose their will, but be obedient to them in every respect^p.”

This arrangement, fortunately for the abased Mercians, was as brief and transient, as vigorous whilst it lasted. The deputy-king, in the true spirit of an oriental Pacha, and knowing that his power would not be lasting, profited by the moment of sunshine which was allowed him, to amass wealth out of the tears and groans of his subjects; but, like many of the Turkish Pachas, he overshot the mark, and drew down signal destruction upon himself. His end, commensurate with that of his country—for Ceolwolf was by birth an Englishman, though “in impiety,” as the chronicle^q expresses it, “he was a barbarian,”—is related by the historian of Croyland abbey as follows.

“Ceolwolf went through the whole of the country which was delegated to him, fleecing all the rustics who were left, devouring the tradespeople, oppressing widows and orphans, and putting the ecclesiastics to every conceivable mode of torture, to make them reveal their treasures. Among other evil deeds which he perpetrated, he set a fine of a thousand pounds on the venerable abbat Godric, and his wretched brethren, by which the monastery of Croyland was well nigh reduced to nothing. So poor was the place become, that no one thought of entering its walls to qualify for admission into the religious order. Abbat Godric was

^o He is called, in the Saxon Chronicle, an “unwise king’s thane.” The dignity of thane was inferior to that of alderman or earl, and seems to have been equivalent to that of baron under the Anglo-Normans.

^p Asser.

unable to maintain even those who had made profession, and distributed many of them throughout the whole country among his relations and other friends of their house. Few of them remained with him in the monastery, and these dragged on their life in want and misery. It was at this time that all the chalices of the abbey except three, and all their silver vessels, except the crucibole of King Witlaf, with all their other valuable ornaments, were coined into money, or sold for money, and even then they hardly satisfied the avarice of Ceolwolf the deputy-king. At length he was deposed by his own friends the Danes, who at least in this particular observed the laws of justice, and with hardly enough clothing left him to cover his nakedness, he miserably died. This took place after king Alfred had prevailed in arms against the Danes, and the kingdom of Mercia was united to Wessex, as it has ever since been down to the present time¹. Such was the end of Mercia, which had existed about two hundred and thirty years, from Penda its first king, to the reign of the wretched deputy-king Ceolwolf, above mentioned."

Whilst the Danish army was still at Repton, they had been joined by large bodies of troops, either from some other part of England, or fresh from Denmark, commanded by Guthrum, Osketel, and Amund². The army was thus, apparently, too numerous any longer to subsist together. Accordingly, early in 875, part of them, under their three kings Guthrum, Osketel, and Amund, marched to Cambridge, where they remained twelve months inactive³. Here we shall

¹ About 1120 when Ingulf wrote.

² H. Hunt.

³ Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

leave them for the present, and follow the footsteps of the other half of the army, who proceeded northwards under Halfden their leader, upon one of their usual expeditions of bloodshed and plunder. The king of Northumberland, Egbert, had died in the year 873, and was succeeded by Rigsig^a. The character of the new king, the extent of his territories, and his abilities to defend them, are alike unknown to us, for little more than his name has been handed down by the Chroniclers. The army of Halfdene, crossing the more southerly province of Deira, pitched their camp on the banks of the Tyne, and immediately began to extend their ravages from thence, as from a centre, over all the neighbourhood. The Scots, alarmed at their near reproach, vainly attempted to make head against them^x, and a "Welsh king fled to Ireland for refuge from their attacks^y." The Picts, no longer formidable, as of old, to the south, were scared at the appearance of warriors fiercer than themselves, and the Strathclyde^z Britons, whose kingdom had sprung out

^a Simeon Dunelm. Hist. alt. Chron. Mailros.

^x "Ethus rex, a pedum celeritate Alipes cognominatus, nulla alia commendatione, rex electus, nisi quia reliquias exercitus a Danis profligati reduxit." Buchanan. Hist. Scot. fol. 51. b. edit. in fol. 1583.

^y "Ann. Ulster, 65. These annals notice some dissensions of the Northmen, in which Halfden killed by stratagem the son of Olaf, one of the kings, or sea-kings, that accompanied Inguar." TURNER, vol. i. 535.

^z "They are called in the Saxon Annals *Stræcledweallas*, and *Stratledweallas*; by Matt. Westm. Wallenses; by Florence of Worc. Stratdunenses; and by Æthelwerd, Cumbri. They were certain Britons, [see Somner's Lexicon] some time inhabiting Galloway in Scotland, but were driven thence by the Picts into Wales, where they seated themselves about the banks and borders of the river Cluid." SPELMAN'S LIFE OF ALFRED, p. 48. note 1.

of war in the midst of conflicting nations, felt their tranquillity for the first time disturbed, and their lands the object of depredation. The city of Carlisle, which lay within their frontiers, and probably was their capital, suffered the most: it was reduced to ruin by the Danes, and lay desolate more than two hundred years, when it was restored in 1092 by William the Conqueror^u.

But here, as in Mercia, nature usurped her rights over the fierce passions of the barbarians. Man is not given to destroy that which he can convert to his own use; and the minds of the most unsettled race of men will, at one time or other, yield to the charms of enjoyment and the luxury of repose. The Archdeacon and historian of Huntingdon is doubtlessly correct, though unsupported by the other five Chronicles, which are our principal authority for these events, when he tells us, that Haldene "seized on the country, and divided it among his men who occupied and cultivated it two years^x." His followers, "settling among the Anglo-Saxons there, and intermarrying with them, became in the course of a few generations so mixed, as to form almost one people. It is not easy, from the vagueness of the old writers, to fix limits; but this fusion was probably felt strongest along our north-eastern coast between the Tees and the Tweed, where some Danish peculiarities are still detected among the people^y."

In the midst of these convulsions we hear nothing of Rigsig, the obscure individual, into whose hands the shadow of the Northumbrian sovereignty had fallen, except that he died in 876, and was succeeded by a

^u Simeon Dun. an. 1092.

^x "Saisivit terram, et divisit eam suis, et coluerunt eam duobus annis."

^y Pict. Hist. of England, vol. i. p. 157.

second Egbert, whose life and actions are as little known to us as those of his predecessor'.

* Hoveden. Chron. Mailros. Dr. Lingard and Lappenberg relate the destruction of Coldingham, where the nuns mutilated their faces, among the events of 875 and 876, but this is certainly a mistake. Hubba, not Haldene, commanded the Danes, when those barbarities were perpetrated, and it happened in 869 or 870, not in 875.

CHAP. XII.

THE LEGEND^a OF THE TRANSLATION OF ST. CUTHBERT'S BODY, WHEREIN ARE RELATED THE FLIGHT OF THE MONKS OF LINDISFARNE FROM BEFORE THE DANISH ARMY, THE CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT OF NORTHUMBRIA AS A DANISH KINGDOM, UNTIL IT FINALLY WAS UNITED TO THE DOMINIONS OF KING ALFRED.

“ALMIGHTY GOD, who is justly merciful and mercifully just, being willing to punish the English nation for their manifold sins, permitted the Fresons and Danes, pagan nations, to exercise their inhumanity over them. These nations, under Hubba, duke of the Fresons, and Halfdene, king of the Danes, arrived in Britain, which is now called England, and, having divided themselves into three bodies, ravaged the country in three directions. One body of them rebuilt

* The ecclesiastical legend, of which a translation forms the text of this chapter, is found in the second volume of *Bedæ Opera Historica*, ed. Stevenson, and in the Appendix to vol. vi. of *Bedæ Opera Omnia*, ed. J. A. G. 12 vols. 8vo. Lond. 1844. It was written soon after the reign of William the Conqueror, as appears by its concluding sentence, (not here given,) in which the writer states, that he had some of his facts from eye-witnesses. It will give the reader a much better picture of the state of things in Northumberland between the years 875 and 894, than any abstract of its contents that I could make in my own language. I have therefore introduced it into the narrative, trusting that the reader will easily distinguish the true from the fabulous. The same legend is found also, in much the same language, but rather abbreviated, in Simeon of Durham's work *De Dunelmensi ecclesia*, lib. ii. cap. 11.

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state of Northumberland

the walls of York^b, and, occupying the neighbouring country on all sides, took up their abode there; the other two, much more ferocious than the first, occupied Mercia and the country of the South Saxons, destroying every thing they came near, both sacred and profane, with fire, rapine, and slaughter. Then might be seen noble and excellent priests slain around the altars on which they had solemnized the holy mysteries of the body and blood of Christ, virgins ravished, the respect due to matrons trodden under foot, infants torn from their mothers' breasts and dashed against the ground, or suspended by the feet, or torn in pieces by the hands of the barbarians; in short, no mercy was shewn by the cruel wretches, to sex, age, or dignity. Yet even thus their brutal ferocity could not glut itself, but they must needs destroy every member of the royal family, from whom they apprehended danger to their dominion. Alfred, the father of King 'Edward the First, alone escaped destruction. . . .

“ About the time of the persecution just mentioned, an intolerable affliction arose of a sudden in Northumberland, which grievously shook the Churches of God in those parts. At that time, a certain man of great abilities, named Eardulf, was ruling, in a praiseworthy manner before God and man, the bishopric of the Church of Lindisfarne^d, in which rested the

^b The writer of the legend here blends together all the principal features of the Danish invaders which had occurred during many years, by way of introduction to his subject, and without adhering very accurately to the time and exact nature of the facts.

^c The writer calls him Edward the First, to distinguish him from Edward the Confessor: he is generally termed, “ Edward the Elder.”

^d Lindisfarne was at this time the episcopal city of the diocese of Durham.

body of Christ's most holy confessor St. Cuthbert*. This man, remembering the last admonitions which that holy father had given his brethren, as he was at the point of death, chose to vacate his place rather than be in subjection to the wicked. For, among other precepts of love and peace which his paternal affection dictated, Saint Cuthbert had thus warned them†. "If you are ever obliged by necessity to choose between the two, I would much rather that you should remove my bones from the tomb, and taking them with you leave this place, and stop where God shall determine, than that you in any way be consenting to iniquity, or submit your necks to the yoke of schismatics." There was at that time also a certain abbat, Edred by name, of wonderful sanctity before God, and of no little nobility among men, who had always as much devotion towards God's holy confessor as the bishop himself. When, therefore, this tribulation came upon them, these two men, taking with them some others of a religious character, carried away the incorruptible body of the venerable father from the monastery of Lindisfarne. When his own people‡ heard of this, they left their houses and household goods, and immediately followed him with their wives and children. For those who are properly called his own people, inasmuch as he keeps them under his especial protection, and they cannot live any where else save

* The Life of St. Cuthbert has been written by the Venerable Bede, and exhibits a curious picture of the superstition and asceticism, which abounded in the seventh century.

† The passage, here quoted, occurs in Venerable Bede's Life of St. Cuthbert, vol. iv. p. 335. *edit. mæ.*

‡ That is, those persons who dwell upon the lands, or, as it was generally termed, the "patrimony" of St. Cuthbert.

under him; these, I say, derive such security from his safeguard, that they fear hardly any injury from adversity. But his having so often with pious care saved from their adversaries who took refuge with him must by no means be referred to their own merits, since all, except a very few, have done evil; yet the question how a firm faith may be of avail to salvation, is a question worthy of every one's consideration.

“ Now it happened by God's providence, that they traversed nearly the whole land, carrying with them the precious body of the holy Confessor. But the bishop and the abbat, overcome at last by the fatigue of this constant toil, deliberated for a long time between themselves, whether they should seek a termination to their labours, and a rest for the saint's body in Ireland, particularly as they saw no hope of remaining in any part of their own country. Wherefore they called together the others who were wiser and older than themselves, and the plan obtained the approbation of all of them. “ It is evident,” said they, “ that we are advised to seek a place of repose in a foreign land; for, if such had not been the will of God, and of the saint himself, we should long ago have had a proper place provided for his own security, and for ourselves.” Such were their words; but the incomprehensible wisdom of God disposed it otherwise. For when they had come together at the mouth of the river Derwent^b, because the passage to Ireland was shortest and easiest from thence, a vessel was got ready, the holy body was placed on board, the bishop and abbat embarked,

^b The river Derwent runs through Cumberland, and empties itself into the sea near Workington: it has, also, the towns of Keswick and Cockermouth on its banks.

together with a few who had been made acquainted with the undertaking, whilst all the others were ignorant of the reason of the voyage. But why do I multiply words? They bade farewell to their friends who were on the shore looking on, and spreading their sails before a favourable wind, turned the ship's head towards Ireland. What was at that moment, do you suppose, the sorrow of those who remained behind? and what was the lamentation which this sorrow gave birth to? They threw themselves prostrate on the ground, sprinkled their heads with dust, tore their garments, and beat their breasts with stones, and with their fists; and at length broke out all together into an exclamation of this kind:—"O thou father and patron of ours, how are we abandoned, wretches that we are, as captives to the rage of our enemies, like sheep to be devoured by wolves!" This was all they uttered.

"On a sudden the wind changed, the waves rose high, and the sea, before tranquil, became dark and stormy; the vessel was tossed this way and that way without guidance, and those who were on board were struck aghast like dead men. Three immense waves, coming one after the other with dreadful sound, filled almost half of the vessel; and, by a miracle unheard of since those of Egypt, were immediately changed to blood. This storm forced the ship on its beam-ends; and a copy of the Evangelists, adorned with gold and jewels, fell overboard into the sea. When they had a little recovered their senses, and recollected who and where they were, they bent their knees, and falling at full length before the feet of the saint, asked pardon for their foolish attempt. Then, seizing the helm, they turned the vessel round to the shore where they had left their friends, and, as they then had the wind

favourable, they very soon arrived there. Then those who had before wept for sorrow, now wept for joy; but the bishop with his companions, shedding tears for shame and sorrow, prostrated himself on the ground, and earnestly prayed forgiveness of his sins.

“Meanwhile the people, compelled by want and hunger, after a long toil of many years¹, ceased to attend upon the holy corpse, and dispersed themselves through the parts of the country that were inhabited, to support their lives in the best manner they were able. For, except the bishop and the abbat, with a few of their men, all departed, save those seven who, as has been before said, were accustomed to attend on the saint's body. These were they who had been brought up and educated by the monks, and, when their masters themselves were found wanting, had undertaken to follow the holy body of the venerable saint from Lindisfarne, and never from that time, whilst they lived, to leave it. Four of these, who seemed to be older than the others, were Hunred, Suthard, Edmund, and Franco, from whose race many of the province of Northumberland, both priests and laymen, are the more proud of being descended, because these men, their ancestors, are said to have attended with such fidelity on the body of the holy Cuthbert. When, therefore, the others were gone, and these were left alone with their treasure, they suffered the greatest anguish from the difficulties of their position, and were unable to determine how to

¹ It appears from Matthew of Westminster and some other Chroniclers, that the body of St. Cuthbert was carried about during seven years. This is a most extraordinary fact, which could hardly be believed, if it were not fully borne out by other similar instances in the annals of the Church.

get out of them, or how to console themselves under them. "What shall we do?" said they, "whither shall we carry the holy father's reliques?" We have been travelling seven years through the land, fleeing from the barbarians: and we have now no place of refuge in our own country; and God has deterred us from seeking rest elsewhere, by laying his scourge visibly upon us. Add to this, that hunger is driving us to seek sustenance wherein we can find it; but the swords of the Danes will not permit us to pass with this treasure in our possession. Lastly, if we abandon it, and provide for ourselves, the people will hereafter ask us for their father and patron—and what shall we answer them? Shall we say that he was taken from us by theft or violence? That he was carried into exile, or abandoned in the deserts? Without a doubt we shall die, and justly so, by their hands, and shall leave our infamy to future ages, attended with the maledictions of all mankind."

"In this strait, they were at length relieved, both in mind and body, by the aid of their pious patron; for the Lord is the refuge of the poor, a very present help in trouble. One of them, Hunred, saw the saint in a vision, and was told by him, that, when the tide was out, they should search for the book, which, as we have already stated, had fallen into the sea, and perhaps, if God took compassion on them, they might find it, though they could not otherwise presume to hope so. For the loss of this book had caused them the greatest anguish of mind. Moreover, he spake these words to him: "As soon as you rise, take a bridle, which you will see hanging on a tree, and hold it up before a horse which you will see not far off, and he will come to you immediately; put the bridle on him, and he will draw for you the carriage in which my

body is placed, and so you will be relieved from your present labour, and be able to follow it." As soon as Hunred awoke, he related the vision which he had seen, and immediately sent some of his companions to the shore, which was not far off, to search for the book which they had lost. Now, by this time they had reached the place called the "White House," or more commonly "Whitherne." They went, accordingly, down to the sea-shore, where they found that the water had ebbed much farther than usual; and, when they had gone three miles or more, they found the holy Volume of the Gospels, with its gold gems and all its outward splendour, as well as its letters, and leaves, and all its inward beauty, so sound and perfect, that it looked as if it had not been touched by the water. At this event their minds, hitherto anxious, were filled with no slight joy, and Hunred, whom I before mentioned, felt no doubt that all the rest would come true also. Wherefore he went and saw the bridle, as he had been told, hanging on a tree; and then, looking on all sides round him, he saw a horse, of a chesnut colour, a little farther off, though it was impossible to say how or whence he could have come into such a desert place. As soon as the man held up the bridle, the horse ran up to him, and offered himself to be bridled. Hunred led him off to his companions, who now were the more encouraged to toil in the cause of the holy saint's body, inasmuch as they saw that his aid would never fail them. Therefore they harnessed the horse to the cart, on which was placed the corpse in a chest, and followed it fearlessly every where, as they knew that they now had a horse provided for them by God. Moreover, the book itself is still kept to this day in the church, which has been thought

worthy to contain the body of the holy saint; and, as I said before, it bears no mark of having been injured by the sea-water^k. This was no doubt brought about by the merits of St. Cuthbert himself, and of the authors of the book, namely, Bishop Eadfrid of blessed memory, who wrote it with his own hand, in honour of the blessed Cuthbert, and his successor, the venerable Ethelwald, who had caused it to be adorned with gold and jewels; also of the hermit Bilfrid, whose skill in workmanship, equalling the intentions of the designer, had executed the splendid work, for he was one of the first artists of his day. These three, burning with zeal towards God's beloved confessor and bishop, left this as a memorial of their devotion towards him to all posterity.

“ But it was now the wish of the saint to provide a resting place for his body, and to release his servants from their seven years' labour: wherefore the impious king Halfdene was, by God's justice, made to pay the penalty for the cruelty which he had shewn towards the church of the saint himself, and the possessions of the other saints. For his mind was struck with madness, and at the same time his body was attacked with dreadful torments, occasioning an intolerable stench, which made him offensive to the whole army. All therefore spurned him and cast him off; whereupon he fled from the Tyne with three ships only, and not long afterwards perished with all his men^l. After

^k This identical book is, I believe, still preserved in the Library of the British Museum, or in one of our other public collections of Manuscripts.

^l The Annals of Ulster, A. D. 876, place the death of Halfden in Ireland. “ Battle at Lochraun, between the Fingals and Dubhgals, where the latter lost Halfden their captain.” “ These Annals notice some

this, the attendants of St. Cuthbert carried his body to a monastery which was formerly in their village, called Creca, and were there hospitably received by the abbat, whose name was Geve, and they resided there four months, quite as if they had been at home. Meanwhile, the army, and those who remained of the natives, were in much commotion for want of a king, whereupon the blessed St. Cuthbert appeared in a dream to the pious abbat Edred, already before mentioned, and, to provide rest for his people, told him to act as follows: "Go," said he, "to the Danish camp, and say that it was I who sent you to them, and ask them where you may find a boy named Guthred, son of Hardecnute, whom they sold to a widow. When you have found him and paid the widow her price for him, bring him before the whole army, and express to them my wish and command that he shall have the bracelet^m placed upon his right arm in Oswiesdune, (that is, Oswy's mount,) and be elected their king." The abbat, when he awoke, told all this to his companions, and immediately went and did as he was commanded. He produced the young man in public, and all, both natives and barbarians, listened obediently to the words of St. Cuthbert, and unanimously raised the youth from slavery to a throne; which honour had no sooner been thus obtained with the favour and good will of all, than the disturbances were ended, tranquillity

dissensions of the Northmen, in which Halfden killed by stratagem the son of Olaf, one of the kings, or sea-kings, that accompanied Ingwar." TURNER, *Hist. of the Anglo-Sax.* vol. i. p. 535.

^m The bracelet seems to have been an emblem of authority among the Danes. See in the next chapter the oath sworn upon their bracelets by the Danish leaders.

^a So called from Oswy, formerly king of Northumberland.

restored, and the episcopal see, which was before at Lindisfarne, was revived at Cuncacester°. Thither, therefore, they also brought the incorruptible body of the saint, at the end of the four months, from Creca; and, at the same time were instituted certain persons to perform God's holy service there: the excellent prelate Eardulf, a man who through good and evil had adhered to St. Cuthbert, was the first who ascended the episcopal throne in that place. King Guthred, too, conferred no few honours and donations on that Church, and with devout humility submitted to him, who from a slave had made him a king. Whatever therefore he ordained for the privileges and liberties of his church, and for the sustenance of those who served him, this faithful minister hastened to fulfil. Lastly, the saint appeared in a vision to the aforesaid abbat, and said to him, "Tell the king to grant the perpetual possession of all the land between the Were and the Tyne to me and to those who serve in my church, that they may receive subsistence from it, and not suffer from want. Bid him furthermore make my church a place of asylum for those who flee to it, so that whoever shall for my cause take refuge with my corpse, shall have peace for thirty days, on no account to be infringed."

"His faithful messenger, the abbat, having told this to the king, both Guthred himself, and the powerful king Alfred, of whom we have made mention above,

° Chester-le-Street was the second see of the diocese of Durham.

° The country which lies between the rivers Tyne and Were, is many miles in extent, and contains at present numerous towns and villages.

¶ Many churches formerly possessed the right of sanctuary: none of them, however, were more favoured in this respect, or enjoyed greater privileges, than the church of St. Cuthbert.

proclaimed it to their subjects, and established it as a law for ever, with the consent and approbation not only of the English, but also of the Danish army[†]. They ordained that those, who in any manner whatever broke the saint's peace, should pay, as a fine, a sum of money equal to that which they paid for breaking the peace of the king, namely, ninety-six pounds at least. Moreover, the land, lying between the two rivers above mentioned was afterwards given to him as he commanded, and a decree was passed, with the concurrence both of the kings above named and of the whole people, that if any one should give land to St. Cuthbert, or if land should have been bought with the saint's money, no one, from that time, should claim from it any service or custom whatever, but the Church alone should possess it for ever in peace, with all its liberties and customs, and, as the saying is, with *sac* and *soen* and *in-fangentheof*[‡]. It was determined by all, that, if any one should in any way infringe these laws and statutes, they should be consigned for ever, unless they behaved better for the future, to fire in hell and the malediction of the Church. A short time after, the Scots assembled a large army, and, among other deeds of cruelty, attacked and plundered the monastery of Lindisfarne; and whilst King Guthred, strengthened by the help of St. Cuthbert, was fighting against them, on a sudden

[†] It is probable that all the Danes, who settled in England, speedily became Christians; barbarous invaders generally adopt the religion as well as the habits of the civilized vanquished.

“Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit.”

[‡] For an explanation of these technical terms, denoting rights which belong to persons in certain cases, see Thorpe's Ancient Laws of England, vol. i. p. 451.

the earth yawned and swallowed up all the enemy alive¹. Thus was re-enacted a miracle of ancient times, whereby the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and overwhelmed the congregation of Abiron. But how this was done has been described elsewhere.

“In the year of our Lord’s Incarnation 894, king Guthred, having reigned many years in prosperity, departed this life, and bequeathed the privileges of the Church of St. Cuthbert, concerning its peace and liberties, and the safety of those who should seek refuge therein from all aggressors, with other statutes in its behalf, to be preserved inviolate by all the kings and bishops, and all people who should come after him, and they are so preserved unto this very day. Indeed, no one has ever ventured, with impunity, to infringe them. Of such as have ventured, the Scots, as I have said, having violated its peace, were suddenly swallowed up alive. Others also, who committed the same crime, were terribly punished for the same, as we shall hereafter describe. When Guthred was dead, king Alfred received the crown of the Northumbrians; for, after St. Cuthbert had appeared to him, he added to his paternal kingdom of the West-Saxons the province of the East-Angles, and now, after Guthred’s death, that of Northumberland also.”

¹ This is, perhaps, the ecclesiastical version of the defeat of the Scots before alluded to, page 140.

² Cuthbert was probably only one of many saints, whose bodies—an invaluable treasure in those days of popular ignorance and monkish fraud—were removed by their votaries in consequence of the Danish ravages. We read in the Chronicle of John Brompton, [fol. 810.] “A. D. 875, the year in which Burhred king of Mercia was expelled by the Danes at Repton, some natives of Hamburg, who resided about five miles from Repton, becoming terrified, removed the body of St. Werburg, the virgin which had long been buried there, and carried it to Chester for safety.”

From this legend we learn, that the Danes, conquerors of Northumberland, blended peaceably with the natives, under the patronage of St. Cuthbert the tutelary saint of the North, and that both nations, after the death of Guthred, the king of their common choice, submitted to the arms of Alfred, when he had recovered all the south of England from the slavery to which it had been subject. But we are anticipating the order of events, and must now return to that division of the Danish army which we left quartered at Cambridge in 875, under its three leaders, Guthrum, Oskettel, and Amund.

CHAP. XIII.

WESSEX THE ONLY SAXON KINGDOM REMAINING—PARTIAL BENEFIT OF THE DANISH INVASIONS—ROLLO BAFFLED IN HIS ATTEMPTS ON ENGLAND—ALFRED TAKES ONE SHIP IN A NAVAL BATTLE WITH THE DANES—SECOND INVASION OF WESSEX IN 876—THE DANES TAKE WAREHAM—MAKE A TREATY WITH ALFRED—BREAK THE TREATY AND SURPRISE EXETER—DESTRUCTION OF THE DANISH FLEET AT SWANAGE—THE DANES MAKE A SECOND TREATY AT EXETER, AND, LEAVING WESSEX, RETIRE TO MERCIA IN 877.

OF all the Saxon Heptarchy, Wessex alone was now able to oppose any longer the invasions of the Danes: yet even Wessex, though still unsubdued, and ever found to present the most effectual resistance to those plunderers, was almost exhausted by continual combats, and was in the end compelled to bend for a time to the storm, which it could no longer withstand. The East-Anglian, Northumbrian, and Mercian kingdoms ceased to exist as members of the Anglo-Saxon confederacy: they were either depopulated, or in absolute subjection to the enemy, who every where abounded, and, unawed by any force or combination of the Saxons, vented their tyranny upon the natives to the utmost: many of them began now to settle and inhabit for a permanence those lands which they had formerly looked upon as hunting-grounds, or as a field for rapine and plunder. This change, however, brought with it one species of consolation to the rustic. The enemies who forage for momentary booty, slay the herdsman, and carry off his cattle; but those

who conquer in order to become colonists and settlers, reserve alive both the cow and her keeper; the former, it is true, to provide the lordly victor with milk and other luxuries; but a portion of what she yields is necessarily bestowed upon the abject attendant, whose services are indispensable to the prosperity of the farms, which yield their yearly subsistence alike to the master and to his slave. The Danes must soon have discerned by experience, that wherever, in the excess of their fury, they had destroyed the people upon whose labours they had lived before, they must of a necessity in the end sit down and learn to labour for themselves.

In several towns of Mercia, the evil done by the Danes was not wholly without its alloy of good in a political point of view. A new vigour was infused into the municipalities where they became permanently settled, and several of the towns long continued to enjoy peculiar privileges, exempting them, no doubt, from burdens which pressed heavily on other communities. Such were the Danish Burghs, as they were called, or Boroughs; these were termed the Five Burghs, and originally consisted of Lincoln, Nottingham, Derby or Deora-by,—the name given by the Danes to the Saxon Northweorthig^a,—Leicester, and Stamford. To these were sometimes added York and Chester, in which case the community passed under the name of the Seven Burghs. They had a court of

^a "Streoneshealh also received from the Danes its present name of Whitby; and, in general, all the districts in England occupied by them are distinguished by places bearing names ending in 'by,' i. e. *city, town*." THORPE'S LAPPENBERG, vol. i. p. 48. On the subject of the Danish burghs, see Laws of Ethelred III. Palgrave, vol. ii. p. ccxcv.

justice, and institutions in common, arising from their relationship in blood, which, in the midst of a country but recently subdued, bound them together by common necessities, if not by common fears.

Whilst the events which we have related were passing in the North, and during the year 875-6, which Guthrum, Osketil, and Amund passed at Cambridge, we hear little of Alfred and his West-Saxons, but they were no doubt fully occupied in repelling the smaller bodies of invaders, who roamed about the northern seas, landing on every coast, and carrying off whatever booty could be extorted from the neglect or weakness of the natives. One of the adventurers who landed in Wessex in 875, was the famous Rollo^b, who afterwards gained for his northern followers their settle-

^b Brompton, Asser. Asserii Annales, Chron. Mailros all seem to agree in placing Rollo's invasion of England in 875. But the Chronicle of Tours says that it happened in the first year of Charles le Gros, i. e. in 877-8.

Spelman seems to have overlooked the passage in Brompton concerning the defeat of Rollo's men in England: his account of it is this: "The departure of Rollo argues not only the hard and busy time that Alfred now had with the Danes, but the abundant surcharge of them at this time within the land, and the misery that the natives the whilst endured. For howsoever Rollo's departure hence is fathered on a dream, whereby he is said to be called into France, yet questionless the great and secret motive was, the infinite numbers of his countrymen here in the land, and the universal waste he saw in every part thereof committed by them, whereby he might well reckon, he should have but a slender booty among such a multitude of sharers. And not unlikely he might judge (and that with great reason) that in some new place, less obvious to the visitation of those rovers, he should find the first and unbroken bulk of plenty more weakly guarded than here the bottoms of their rifled coffers were." *LIFE OF ALFRED*, p. 51.

In the time of King Ethelstan, Rollo made a second expedition into England, being called in by that king to assist him [Tho. Walsingham's *Hypodigma Neustriæ, sub initium*] against some rebels.

ments in France. Though almost all accounts of these affairs have perished, yet that the star of this able captain and freebooter was eclipsed by that of his more illustrious contemporary, is a fact which has found its way to the light through all the surrounding darkness. Rollo passed the winter in England, and plundered the country; but when they met the Anglo-Saxon army, his troops were broken, and many of them were slain; the rest escaped to France, where better fortune awaited them, and they laid the foundation of the Norman power, afterwards so celebrated throughout Europe.

About the same time that Rollo was repulsed from our shores, king Alfred, entering upon a new career, put to sea, and meeting with a small fleet consisting of seven Danish ships, captured one of them; the rest saved themselves by flight^c. We are not told on what part of the coast this sea-fight took place; but it is a fact of some importance, because it seems to shew, that the king already began to turn his attention to the formation of a navy, as the only safeguard to the liberties of a kingdom surrounded on all sides by the sea.

If, however, we should assert that this attack on the Danish fleet was looked upon as a breach of the treaty into which Alfred had formerly entered, and led to the second invasion of Wessex, which was now about to take place, such assertion, however seemingly just, if we look only to the short interval between the provocation and its supposed consequences, must however be made with diffidence; for it is hard to say whether the Danes quartered at Cambridge were the same as those who had formerly left Wessex when they made an armistice with the king. Neither is it certain whether the attack alluded to was made upon the fleet

^c Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

belonging to the Danes quartered at Cambridge, or upon some other smaller body of Danish pirates, by whom the whole sea was then infested. In this uncertainty we must again commit ourselves to the guidance of the Chroniclers, who have given us a catalogue of facts, unconnected indeed as cause and effect, yet free from those erroneous views which history, coloured by the imagination, so frequently exhibits.

In the dead of night, in 876, the three Danish kings, Guthrum, Osketil, and Amund, with their numerous army, "stole away" from the camp at Cambridge, where they had been twelve months inactive, and sailed round the coast of England till they came to Dorsetshire. Here they landed, and took by surprise the town of Wareham, situated near the mouths of the rivers Trent* and Frome. This place, in ancient times, was defended on three sides by the water; and the Anglo-Saxons, perceiving its natural strength, had already converted it into a fortress. The harbour of Poole formally washed its walls, and no doubt afforded an advantageous anchorage for the Danish fleet[†]. The activity of Alfred was now employed to remedy the evil which no human forethought could have anticipated. He presented himself with a large army before the fortress where the Danish army lay, and offered them battle. Both sides, however, laboured under peculiar disadvantages: the Danes were inferior in numbers, and did not dare

[†] Sax. Chron.

* This river is now called the Piddle.

[†] It would appear from the words of Ethelwerd, "*conjecit statum communem cum occidentali exercitu, quod ante non usi sunt,*" that there was another army of Danes, at this time, in the West of England.

to hazard an engagement; the English were little skilled in sieges, and ventured not to attack the entrenchments of the Danes, which, as they had already experienced several years before at Reading, were always skilfully and strongly constructed. In this position of affairs, the Danes had recourse to their usual treachery, and began to treat with the English, whom they hoped to deceive into a false security, until their own army should be reinforced^a. Having formed this determination, they entered without scruple into all the sanctions and forms of obligation which the ingenuity of Alfred could devise. They made oath, not only on the Christian relics^b of saints, "which Alfred," says Asser, "held in veneration next to the Deity himself," but, also, on the holy ringⁱ, a bracelet, which was with them a solemn and most unusual form of adjuration, that they would depart the kingdom: and, as a guarantee of their faith, they hesitated not to give as many hostages as Alfred chose to select from the highest and most noble

^a Matthew of Westminster gives this view of the matter: it is highly probable, though not so related in either of the six earlier Chronicles.

^b Asser.

ⁱ Sax. Ch. Ethelw. "The 'beag,' or bracelet, appears to have been of a somewhat oval form, and open on one side: but it also signifies a ring. The ceremony here noticed may perhaps be elucidated by the following passage from Arngrim Jonas: 'In ara præterea annulus asservabatur argentens, vel ex orichalco, unciarum xx, quem forensi aliquo munere fungentes, jusjurandum jam præstituri, victimarum illinitum cruore, religiose inter jurandum contrectabant.' *Rer. Island.* i. 7; and see Bartholinus, *De armillis*, p. 101." PETRIE IN CORPUS HISTORICUM, p. 355, note. See also M. Adamus, [*Eccles. Hist.* lib. i. cap. 33.] Olaus Mag. [lib. viii. c. 2.] and the annals of Fuld. [sub an. 873.]

persons in their army^k. On the other hand, Alfred may be supposed to have bargained, that he would not molest them on their retreat, for nothing is said by the Chroniclers concerning his part of the treaty except by Ethelwerd alone, who adds, that their departure was purchased with money. If the fact be so, we cannot hesitate to condemn the king's policy, which only served to furnish supplies to the enemy, though it may have been deemed of advantage to the English to procure a cessation, however short, from the harassing warfare to which they were exposed. The result, however, proved the fallaciousness of the king's hopes; the enemy "practised their usual treachery, and, caring nothing for the hostages or their oaths, broke the treaty, and, sallying forth by night, attacked and slew all the cavalry that were in attendance upon the king^l." The horses belonging to the slain were sufficiently numerous to mount a large body of the Danes, who, having this rapid mode of transit, crossed the borders of Devonshire, and occupied the city of Exeter, which was surrounded by high and strong walls. Alfred, indignant at this breach of faith, hanged the hostages^m, and followed with his army, but did not overtake them until they were safe within the fortifications of Exeterⁿ. The king was again baffled, and retired with his troops: the Danes spent the winter in Exeter.

The rest of the year 876 seems to have passed without any other achievement or event of importance; but the Danish army was continually receiving reinforcements. "The number of that disorderly crew," says Asser,

^k Sax. Ch. &c.

^l Asser.

^m Brompton, fol. 809.

ⁿ Matthew of Westminster is rather more explanatory here than the six older Chronicles.

“increased every day, so that if thirty thousand of them were slain in one battle, others took their places to double the number.” But King Alfred was not deterred from his purpose by the increasing multitude of his enemies. On the contrary, he at length perceived in what manner their depredations could be most effectually checked, and the arrivals of fresh troops be prevented.

It was now his intention no longer to wait patiently until they should be landed in his country, but to meet them upon the sea, when, cooped in their narrow vessels, and fatigued with their voyage, they would present no formidable opposition; or even if they were successful and should effect a landing, they would be weakened by the previous encounter, and the less able to prosecute their ravages. With these views the king had for some time determined to create a navy: with a clear conviction of the benefit which would result from this plan, he caused to be built a large number of long boats and galleys fit to serve along the coast. As the Saxons, since their settlement in Britain, had entirely abandoned naval pursuits, it was necessary for the king to look abroad for sailors to supply his navy: fortunately for this especial purpose the sea was covered with pirates, i. e. adventurers who went about, with larger or smaller bands of followers, according to their means, in quest of what they could get, and it was not difficult for the king to enlist as many of these as he pleased in his service. Thus a fleet was created, capable in some measure of contending with that of the enemy; and the first duty which was imposed on the new navy was to guard the seas, and prevent supplies from being thrown into Exeter, which it was now the intention of the king to besiege.

In the beginning of 877, the army at Wareham removed, partly by land, and partly on board their ships, to Swanage, on the coast of Dorsetshire, intending to sail from thence to Exeter: but a storm here surprised them, by which they were so shattered, that when the fleet of Alfred came suddenly upon them, they were defeated at all points, and lost no less than a hundred and twenty ships*. Whilst these events were passing, Alfred marched to Exeter, and laid siege to that city. The Danish garrison, shut out from reinforcements or supplies by the activity of the English fleet, and disheartened by the loss of their ships at Swanage, once more offered a capitulation, apparently still more favourable to the English than that which they before had violated. The English king again received hostages from them, and compelled them to promise on oath that they would leave his territories. This time the Danes faithfully observed their promise: in the month of August^p, 877, the

* The account given in the text seems to me to be the only possible mode of reconciling the discordant narratives of the Saxon Chron. Asser, Ethelwerd, Flor. Sim. Hunt. and Matthew of Westminster. A principal cause of the difficulty is the fact, that Asser mentions two fleets of 120 ships, and he adds, that they were a fresh arrival from Denmark. It may be doubted whether a similar reduplication of events has not crept in concerning the attack on Alfred's cavalry, the first march to Exeter, and the king's first pursuit in 876. Those who mention only one march to Exeter, are not agreed as to the year: some place it in 876, others in 877: the expression in Asser *hiemabant*, makes it probable that it happened on the confines of the two years, viz. in Dec. 876, or in Jan. 877. It should also be mentioned, that Swanwich in Hampshire, and not Swanage in Dorsetshire, has been sometimes selected as the place where the Danish fleet was destroyed. If that fleet was a fresh arrival, both theories are tenable: if however it belonged to the army at Wareham, Swanage in Dorsetshire has superior claims.

^p Mense Augusto, ASSER. Instanti autumni tempore, FLOR.

whole army left Wessex and entered Mercia^a, which had now been two years under the deputy-king Ceolwolf. This miserable hireling, according to his former agreement, surrendered to the Danes a portion of the Mercian kingdom, and was allowed to retain the remainder for a time in his own possession'. That part which he gave up was speedily divided out among the Danish soldiers, who settled upon their allotments, and seemed likely, after the example of their countrymen in East-Anglia and Northumbria, to become peaceful occupiers of the lands which they had once so fearfully ravaged'.

^a "They fixed their huts in Gloucester after various turns," says Ethelwerd, alone of all the Chroniclers.

^r See the account of his cruelties and death in page 138.

^s "The conduct of Alfred, in the first years of his reign, seems to have been imprudent. While acting with his brother, he was energetic and indefatigable; but, after he became possessed of the crown himself, instead of a system of vigilance and vigour against his enemies, we find nothing but inert quietude, temporising pacifications, and transient armaments. The only plan discernible in the first seven years of his reign, was to gain a momentary repose. An interval of tranquillity was certainly obtained; but it was a delusive slumber on the precipice of fate." TURNER, vol. i. p. 538. After a careful perusal of the Chroniclers, I am not convinced that these views of our able historian are well-founded, at least not to their full extent. If we look to the result of Alfred's exertions, we find that the second invasion of Wessex, which forms the subject of the text above, was as unsuccessful as the former, begun in 871, whilst king Ethelred was still alive.

CHAP. XIV.

THIRD INVASION OF WESSEX IN JAN. 878.—SEIZURE OF CHIPPENHAM—RETREAT OF THE KING TO THE WILDS OF SOMERSETSHIRE—OPINIONS OF DIFFERENT WRITERS ON THIS EVENT—SUPPOSED DISCOVERY OF A BATTLE AT CHIPPENHAM, AS RELATED BY JOHN BROMPTON.

WHEN the army of the three Danish kings, in August 877, retired to Mercia, and presented the appearance of converting their swords into ploughshares for the cultivation of the lands which they had conquered, the kingdom of Wessex, for aught that the Chroniclers have told us to the contrary, was left entirely free from the spoilers.

We may receive the account, which Henry of Huntingdon has left us, as a true though brief summary of the state in which things were at the period we are describing :

“ It was the seventh year^a of King Alfred’s reign ; and the Danes were in possession of all the kingdom on the northern side of the Thames ; Haldene reigned in Northumberland ; the brother of Haldene in East Anglia ; and the three kings [*Guthrum, Oskutel, and Amund*] above mentioned were with their deputy-king Ceolwolf in Mercia ; so that to Alfred nothing remained but that part of the kingdom, which lies to the south of the river Thames.”

But this territory to the south of the Thames was all that had ever belonged in separate sovereignty to

^a From the 23d of April 877, to the 23d of April 878.

Alfred: neither he nor his predecessors had ever exercised personal and immediate jurisdiction over Mercia, East Anglia, or Wessex, which at the utmost had only acknowledged vassalage, as subordinate kingdoms, to Egbert. If, therefore, the war had now been brought to a close, the kingdom of Wessex would have been little the worse for its long conflict with the Danes; and, in the course of a few generations, the three more northern states would have borne but faint marks of their violent change of masters. But a great crisis was impending, of more importance to our History than all that we have yet related; and it unfortunately happens, that our original records become more than usually concise, nay almost silent, upon subjects which would be of the greatest interest, and about which we could not have known too much. In consequence of this deficiency in our early authorities, modern historians have laudably and ably endeavoured by conjecture to supply the links which are necessary to connect the narrative, and to weave it into such a continuity, as to impart some portion of interest, perhaps also of instruction, to the reader. The different views, which different writers have adopted on this portion of our history, have also been promulgated with less personal violence than is sometimes unhappily found to exist between opposing theories. It may also be observed, that those who have lately treated of the interesting but obscure events of the year 878, have adhered with much fidelity to the old Chroniclers, and have exercised the powers of their imagination by way of supplement, and not as a substitute for the actual facts which those Chroniclers supply. Thus a skilful architect, when he is invited to restore an old and beautiful but dilapi-

dated building, preserves with scrupulous care all the outline of its design, together with the symmetry of such parts as time has saved, and, if he is compelled by necessity to construct afresh any portions which have entirely disappeared, he will mark such parts in his plan as not original, but the offspring—perhaps the beautiful offspring—of his own skill, not unworthy to occupy the place which he has assigned them in the venerable fabric.

Following the example of this prudent artist, I shall endeavour to collect all that the original writers have left us concerning the year which forms the crisis in King Alfred's life, and with these accounts to compare the additions and restorations which have been made by modern historians; to reject such of these as appear to be unwarranted by fact or probability, and to enlarge or illustrate others which seem to be founded on an acute discrimination of what is true or false in the perplexing pages of history.

The evacuation of Wessex was, perhaps, one of those perfidious feints, by which the Danes had so often deceived their opponents; for a remarkably short space of time—only four months—passed away, and we find them again assailing the Saxons with equal fury, and unfortunately with greater success. But the witnesses, who can give us the original narrative of these events, shall come before us in order, and tell their own story.

The first of these is Asser, who, as the personal friend of the king, may have heard from those who were present, probably from the king himself, what took place in Wiltshire, in the month of January 878.

“In the year of our Lord's incarnation 878, which was the thirtieth of King Alfred's life, the army above mentioned, from Exeter, went to Chippenham, a royal

villa, situated in the west of Wiltshire, and on the eastern bank of the river, which is called in British the Avon. There they wintered, and drove many of the inhabitants of that country beyond sea by the force of their arms, and by want of the necessities of life. They reduced almost entirely to subjection all the people of that country.

“At the same time, the above-named Alfred, king of the West Saxons, with a few of his nobles, and certain soldiers^b and vassals, used to lead an unquiet life among the woodlands of the county of Somerset, in great tribulation; for he had none of the necessities of life, except what he could forage openly or stealthily, by frequent sallies, from the Pagans, or even from the Christians who had submitted to the rule of the Pagans, and, as we read in the life of St. Neot^c, at the house of one of his cowherds.”

Similar to the foregoing is the testimony of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a portion of which perhaps was written soon after the events it records:

“A. D. 878. This year, during midwinter, after Twelfth night, [*i. e. after Jan. 6.*] the army stole away to Chippenham, and overran the land of the West Saxons, and sat down there; and many of the people they drove beyond the sea, and of the remainder the greater part they subdued, and forced to obey them, except King Alfred, and he, with a small band,

^b Perhaps *miles* may here be equivalent to knight, or some similar order of men, as it often was after the Norman Conquest.

^c This sentence has been inserted, probably as a marginal note, by a copyist, for we are not certain that St. Neot was dead when Asser wrote this; and it is not probable that any life of him existed at that time.

retreated with difficulty to the woods, and to the fastnesses of the moors."

Ethelwerd does little more than vary the language of the two preceding authorities :

" A. D. 878. At the end of that year [877], this foul mob broke the compact which they had before solemnly made with the Western English, and they take up their winter-quarters at Chippenham. The people were every where unable to resist: some of them were driven over the sea into the Gallic shores^d. King Alfred, also, at this time was straitened more than was becoming."

Of the three Chroniclers who wrote after the Norman Conquest, Florence and Simeon add nothing to the testimony already given. Henry of Huntingdon slightly varies the account thus :

" Though nothing but the country on the south side of the Thames remained to King Alfred, the three kings who were in Mercia begrudged him even that. They therefore came to Chippenham in Wessex with a great multitude just arrived from Denmark^e; and covering the land like locusts, because there was no one to resist them, they took possession of it for themselves. Part of the Saxon people fled beyond the sea; part followed Alfred, who concealed himself with a few followers in the woods; another part of them made submission to the enemy."

These passages give us all that remains of original

^d Gallia, Gualia, or Wallia. Does this mean France or Wales? I am disposed to believe the latter.

^e Other authorities assure us, that the Danes received a large reinforcement from Denmark. " *Exercitus de Exancestre adiit Chipenham cum mira multitudine quæ nuper venerat de Dania.*" [Chron. Mailros, p. 144.]

testimony concerning the third invasion of Wessex at the beginning of 878, and the temporary downfall of its king. Let us next see what has been made out of these accounts by modern writers.

First, Spelman introduces this part of the subject, as follows :

The Danes who retired from Exeter to Mercia “ were but few in comparison of the great multitudes of them, which scatteringly filled every corner of the land, who after diverse dispersings by little and little gathering together, enticed themselves into one body, and being so much increased with new incomes, as they were become a mighty army, like locusts (saith Huntingdon) covering the face of the earth, they despise any longer to be resisted by so poor a handful as the Saxons now were grown unto, and, therefore, contrary to faith, and oath, and the security of their hostages, they enter the king’s country, and like a raging flood, bearing all before it, they chase away the natives. And at Chippenham, in Wiltshire, at that time a principal town of the kings of the West-Saxons, and in the heart of the country, they set them down, not intending a wintering only (as at other times) and away, but, seeing the other parts of the kingdom either waste or already in dividend among their countrymen, and this the only fresh part of the island, and most to be desired for receipt of so great a plantation, they choose that to be the lot of their residence.

“The Saxons were before quite spent and done, their late actions had utterly overthrown them; only for the present they subsisted rather in the reputation of their prince and credit of their former deeds, than any real power that at this time survived in them; and

the Danes (as it were afraid of the lion's skin) had made a stand awhile, and forbore to attempt any further against the king ; but that fear quickly vanishing, they no sooner now entered the king's country, but the Saxons (that knew they wanted no more to make an end of them, than that the enemy should insist upon the advantage that he had) finding all gone, began to think it time to look every one unto his own safety ; those of the best condition and truest to their prince to fly into Wales, or to hide themselves in the woods and safest places of the kingdom ; the rest, looking only on the present face of things, and preferring security, though upon the vilest terms whatsoever, before trouble and danger, revolted from the king, and submitted themselves to the barbarous enemy, doubly augmenting him thereby, to what like number of others could have done, because it was with his adversary's equal diminution.

“Alfred seeing his subjects fly, the enemy in the midst of his country, and no means left either to unite or solicit the few that remained unto him, being forced to give way unto the rage of fortune and comply with it, lays aside all kingly state and show of being a prince, disposes of his family according to present necessity, and taking the disguise of an obscure and common soldier, he at first commits himself and his safety to one who (according to the manner of those times) had the charge and keeping of some of the king's cows : whether as a soldier only, and unknown, or whether as king, and known unto the neat-herd himself, appeareth not : but as to the neat-herd's wife, it is clear, by a tale they tell of her, that she had no suspicion who he was.”

These views of Spelman have passed current in the

writings of all our modern historians, until the beginning of the present century, when rhetorical amplification of what was at first concise and glowing pictures of what was originally obscure, are no longer admitted into the pages of authentic history. The want of connection between the invasion of Wessex and the retreat of Alfred as a fugitive and outcast did not escape the notice of Turner, who, by his powerful and extensive examination of original documents, has led the public to regret that he did not make the life of the great Alfred a subject of minute and specific enquiry in a separate work. I may, without impropriety, in this trial of the witnesses, introduce the whole passage in which he justly enumerates the difficulties which assail us.

“These circumstances,” he observes,—namely, those which are found in the narratives of the contemporary writers above quoted,—“are so extraordinary, that it is difficult to comprehend them. The Danes invade Wessex, the country falls, undefended, into their hands, and Alfred preserves his life by such a concealment, that his friends were as ignorant as his enemies, both of his residence and fate.

“Such became his distress, that he knew not where to turn; such was his poverty, that he had even no subsistence but that which by furtive or open plunder he could extort, not merely from the Danes, but even from those of his subjects who submitted to their government; or by fishing and hunting obtain. He wandered about in woods and marshes in the greatest penury with a few companions; sometimes, for greater secrecy, alone. He had neither territory, nor, for a time, the hope of regaining any.

“To find Alfred and the country in this distress, and

at the same time to remark, that no battles are mentioned to have occurred between the arrival of the Northmen at Chippenham and the flight of the king, or the subjection of the country, are circumstances peculiarly perplexing. It is not stated, on this invasion, as it is on every other, that Alfred collected an army, and resisted the Northmen; that he retired at the head of his forces, though defeated; that he posted himself in any fortress^f, or that he took any measures to defend the country against its enemies. They invade in January, and between that month and the following Easter, a very short period, all this disaster occurred.

“The power of the Danes had been formidable, but it had never been found by Alfred to be irresistible; and the events of a few months proved that it was easily assailable. When they attacked his brother, they met a resistance which has been recorded. When they attacked himself in the preceding years, his means of opposition, though not vigorous, are yet noticed. But, on this invasion, a most remarkable silence occurs as to any measures of defence. As far as we can penetrate into such an obscured incident, we can discern none; nothing appears but panic and disaffection in the people; inactivity and distress in the king.

“To suppose that the Northmen surprised him by a rapid movement into Wessex is no diminution of the difficulty, because they had been eight years in the

^f “This was remarkable,” observes the same author in a note [7, pag. 540,] “because Odun’s defence in Kynwith [*see hereafter*] and Alfred’s subsequent fortification in Ethelingey, shew how such a retreat would have protected the country. Hoveden says that his ministers retired to Kynwith, p. 417.”

island, moving about as they pleased; and often with celerity, for the purpose of easier victory. Rapidity of motion was, indeed, a part of their usual tactics, both in England and in France; and not to have prepared against an event that was always possible, and always impending over him, impeaches both the judgment and patriotism of the king at this period of peril.

“Before Alfred, from a respected sovereign, would have become a miserable fugitive, we should expect to read of many previous battles; of much patriotic exertion, corresponding with his character and dignity, and the duties of his station, and worthy of his intellect. If defeated in one county, we should look for him in another; always with an army, or in a fortress; always withstanding the fierce enemies who assaulted him.

“What overwhelmed Alfred with such distress? What drove him so easily from his throne? It could not be, as Sir John Spelman intimates, that the Saxons ‘were before quite spent and done:’ because it is not true, that in 877 they fought ‘seven desperate battles.’ These battles have been placed in this year hitherto erroneously. On comparing every reputable Chronicler with Asser, the friend of the king, we find them to have occurred in the last year of Ethelred’s reign, and the first of Alfred’s. Since that period, though the king sometimes headed armies, no sanguinary conflict is mentioned to have ensued in Wessex. Seven years had now elapsed without one important struggle; the strength of West Saxony was therefore unimpaired, because one third of the juvenile population at Alfred’s accession, would, in 878, have attained the age of courageous manhood.

▪ See the extract from Spelman in page 172.

“That the arrival of new supplies from the Baltic, could not have ‘broken the spirits of the Saxons’ so suddenly, and have ‘reduced them to despair,’ is probable, because the West Saxons had not, for the last seven years, ‘undergone a miserable havoc in their persons and property,’ and had exerted no ‘vigorous actions in their own defence.’ So far from being reduced to the necessity of despair, we shall find that a single summons from their king, when he had recovered his self-possession, and resolved to be the heroic patriot, was sufficient to bring them eagerly into the field, though the undisputed occupation of the country for some months must have rendered the collection of an adequate force more difficult, and its hostilities far less availing, than before. The king is not stated to have troubled them with exhortations, to defend ‘their prince, their country, and their liberties^h,’ before he retired. And it is remarkable, that the foes, whom he had left at Chippenham, he found near Westbury, when he made the effort which produced his restoration. Amid all the confusion, emigration, and dismay, which his seclusion must have produced, twenty miles composed the extent of their intermediate progress. The invaders, whose conquests when unresisted were so circumscribed, and whose triumphs were afterwards destroyed by one well-directed effort, could not have exhibited that gigantic port, which intimidates strength into imbecility, and ensures destruction, by annihilating the spirit that might avert itⁱ.”

The next author in point of time who has treated of this subject is Dr. Lingard, who has written a History of England, characterised by elegance of skill, and, in

^h “This is our Hume's mistaken account.”

ⁱ Hist. Ang. Sax. vol. i. p. 539.

some parts of it, by much original research. In his account of Alfred, for the year 878, he attempts to smooth the difficulties which his predecessor had pointed out, as follows :

“ At the close of the last campaign, we left him in the undisturbed possession of the kingdom of Wessex : at the beginning of the next year, we discover him a solitary fugitive, lurking in the morasses of Somersetshire. This sudden revolution arose from the policy of Gothrun, the most artful of the Northmen. That chieftain, on his retreat out of Wessex, had fixed his residence at Gloucester, and rewarded the services of his veterans by dividing among them the lands in the neighbourhood. But, while this peaceful occupation seemed to absorb his attention, his mind was actively employed in arranging a plan of warfare, which threatened to extinguish the last of the Saxon governments in Britain. A winter campaign had hitherto been unknown in the annals of Danish devastation : after their summer expeditions, the invaders had always devoted the succeeding months to festivity and repose ; and it is probable, that the followers of Gothrun were as ignorant as the Saxons of the real design of their leader.

“ On the first day of the year 878, they received an unexpected summons to meet him on horseback at an appointed place : on the night of the 6th of January, they were in possession of Chippenham, a royal villa on the left bank of the Avon. There is reason to believe that Alfred was in the place when the alarm was given ; it is certain that he could not be at any great distance. From Chippenham, Gothrun dispersed his cavalry in different directions over the neighbouring counties : the Saxons were surprised by

the enemy before they had heard of the war; and the king saw himself surrounded by the barbarians, without horses, and almost without attendants. At first he conceived the rash design of rushing on the multitude of his enemies: but his temerity was restrained by the more considerate suggestions of his friends; and he consented to reserve himself for a less dangerous and more hopeful experiment. To elude suspicion, he dismissed the few thanes who were still near his person, and endeavoured, alone and on foot, to gain the centre of Somersetshire. There he found a secure retreat in a small island, situated in a morass formed by the confluence of the Thone and the Parret^k."

"To account for the sudden retreat of Alfred," says the same historian in a note to the foregoing passage, "and the temporary extinction of the West-Saxon powers, has perplexed most historians. I shall not enumerate their different hypotheses, as the account given in the text satisfactorily, in my opinion, explains the whole difficulty, and is supported by authorities which seem to have been." The author then proceeds to quote the passage from the Saxon Chronicle, which I have given in a preceding page^l; and observes, in conclusion, on the authority of Ethelwerd's expression *obequitando*, 'galloping over the country,' that the success of the Danish army was owing to their celerity.

Soon after the appearance of Dr. Lingard's History, Lappenberg, an able and learned German, published his History of the Anglo-Saxons. The author has examined deeply into the sources upon which his work is compiled, but he gives us no new light upon the

^k Lingard, Hist. of England, vol. i. p. 169.

^l Page 170.

subject of our present enquiry. Yet, that nothing may be omitted, we will hear his testimony in his own words.

"The condition of Wessex," says he, "was truly deplorable. The Danes had penetrated so far into the northern parts, and devastated the country so cruelly, that the district of the brave Sumorsætas alone remained free from their ravages. On many of his subjects, particularly those of British race, Alfred could place no reliance; and many of the natives, driven by fear and want, had fled beyond the sea, while others preferred subjection to the barbarous pagans, and not only forsook, but even rebelled, against the stedfast king. Had a hostile spear at that time pierced him, had his noble heart been capable of quailing, of prompting him to a weak desperate sacrifice, or of allowing him to seek safety among his continental kindred, then would both the royal race and freedom have been extinguished in England, and the country, turned into a desert, have fallen a prey to the northern pirates. With a few of his nobles, warriors, and vassals.....the king, forsaken by and separated from his people, passed some months during the winter in the cottage of one of his cowherds, among the woods and marshes of Somersetshire, where subsistence for himself and his followers was only to be obtained, either by force or stratagem from the Pagans, or from the Christians under their subjection."

I shall content myself with one more quotation from the Pictorial History of England, a valuable work, whose author evidently had before him the foregoing paragraph from Dr. Lingard, when he wrote that which follows :

▪ Thorpe's Lappenberg, vol. ii. p. 52.

“ Guthrum had no sooner retreated from Exeter, than he began to prepare for another war: and this he did with great art, and by employing all his means and influence; for he had learned to appreciate the qualities of his enemy, and he was himself the most skilful, steady, and persevering of all the invaders. He fixed his head-quarters at no greater distance from Alfred than the city of Gloucester, around which he had broad and fertile lands to distribute among his warriors. His fortunate raven attracted the birds of rapine from every quarter; and when every thing was ready for a fresh incursion into the west, he craftily proceeded in a new and unexpected manner. A winter campaign had hitherto been unknown among the Danes, but on the 1st day of January, 878, his choicest warriors received a secret order to meet him on horseback at an appointed place. Alfred was at Chippenham, a strong residence of the Wessex kings. It was the feast of the Epiphany or Twelfth-night, and the Saxons were probably celebrating the festival, when they heard Guthrum and his Danes were at the gates. Surprised thus, by the celerity of an overwhelming force, they could offer but an ineffectual resistance. Many were slain; the foe burst into Chippenham, and Alfred, escaping with a little band, retired with an anxious mind to the woods and the fastnesses of the moors. As the story is generally told, the king could not make head against the Danes; but other accounts state, that he immediately fought several battles in succession. We are inclined to the latter belief, which renders the broken spirits and despair of the men of Wessex more intelligible; but all are agreed in the facts, that, not long after the Danes stole into Chippenham, they rode over the kingdom of Wessex, where no army was

left to oppose them; that numbers of the population fled to the Isle of Wight and the opposite shores of the continent, while those who remained tilled the soil for their hard-taskers", the Danes, whom they tried to conciliate with presents and an abject submission. The brave men of Somerset alone retained some spirit, and continued in the main true to their king; but even in their country, where he finally sought a refuge, he was obliged to hide in fens and coverts, for fear of being betrayed to his powerful foe Guthrun*."

From these extracts it is evident, that those who have written, either directly or incidentally, of this portion of English history, have met with a stumbling-block in the sudden vicissitude which Alfred's career presents, apparently from no sufficient cause, in the short space of three or four months at the beginning of the year 878. The difficulty, slightly glossed over by Spelman and other writers, has been put forward in all its force by Turner, and runs more or less through those who have followed him; and it will be noticed, that they agree in supposing that a battle or battles must have been fought at Chippenham before so brave a king would resign his crown and retire to the woods and the fastnesses of the moors. "No battles," says

* I cannot approve of this mode of amplifying old histories. Does it not strike the reader how very brief must have been the servitude of the West-Saxons? They were overthrown by the invaders in January, and in June King Alfred gave the Danes a total overthrow at Ethandune, by which the kingdom of Wessex was reestablished stronger than before. If the Saxons were in the interval compelled to plant and sow, they ought afterwards to have been grateful to the Danes for having been made to do a thing so necessary; for if they planted in January, it was to their own benefit, as they reaped the fruits themselves in July and August.

° Pict. Hist. of England, vol. i. p. 158.

Turner, "are mentioned to have occurred between the arrival of the Northmen at Chippenham and the flight of the king!" and then, as if he anticipated Dr. Lingard's reply, he observes, that the speed with which the Danes surprised Alfred is no diminution of the difficulty, for they had been eight years in the island, and rapidity of movement was the prevailing feature of their wars. No fresh facts or new theories are adduced by Lappenberg or by the author of the last extract above quoted: though the latter of those writers expresses his disposition to incline towards the opinion of those who believe that a battle or battles must have preceded the king's flight and the submission of the West-Saxons. As no more recent writer has adopted the theory which Turner was the first to propose, as an explanation of the king's sudden downfall, namely, that his oppressive government during the first seven years of his reign caused his subjects to abandon him, I shall defer until the next chapter the consideration of that subject, not as connected with the occurrences of 878, but as a separate matter of enquiry, that nothing may be omitted in delineating the character and actions of a king whose history belongs, not to England alone, but to the world and to mankind.

Let us then at present enquire, whether there are no original records still remaining of a battle fought at Chippenham, in which Alfred was defeated, and compelled to flee for safety to the "woods and fastnesses of the moors." It will be noticed in the Saxon Chronicle, that though no battle is described, yet there is an allusion to a battle:—"they," i. e. the Danes, "subdued the greater part—except King Alfred, who *with difficulty retreated* to the woods," &c. Kings,

who have large armies, always ready for action, as King Alfred had at this time, do not retreat *with difficulty*, until those armies have been defeated. Notwithstanding this strong probability, we look in vain through the annals of Ethelwerd, Asser, Florence, Simeon, and Henry of Huntingdon, for any account of a battle at Chippenham leading to such a strange and sudden vicissitude in King Alfred's life. It is equally fruitless to look through the histories of Roger de Wendover, Matthew Paris, William of Malmesbury, and many others, who wrote about 150 years after the Norman Conquest. The Chronicles of Melrose abbey, of Peterborough, and of Croyland, supply nothing to fill up the blank which has caused so much difficulty. Yet the important fact, for which so strict a search has been made, may, I believe, be found in the Chronicle of John Brompton, the historian of Jorvaulx abbey. This writer's historical work ends in the year 1199, though it is supposed that he lived a century later, in the reign of King Edward III. The chronology of Brompton for the whole of Alfred's life is clearly erroneous, and the facts which he relates are not only in many cases perfectly irreconcilable with those mentioned by other writers, but they are also put into a different order, and told in a different manner, as if he had not always seen the earlier writers, who, as is well known, copy one from the other almost in the same words. From this it results that Brompton, though valuable as a subsidiary, cannot be depended upon for the accuracy of his statements, when they are in contradiction to the earlier contemporary writers. When, however, these are silent, we may with propriety examine his history for facts, which, though he witnessed them not himself, he has nevertheless copied

from others who were eye-witnesses, but whose writings in the lapse of centuries have perished. I shall, therefore, without more preface, lay before the reader John Brompton's narrative of the first years of Alfred's reign, and, I believe, we shall there find, though misplaced by an interval of several years, the battle of Chippenham, for which historians have been so long seeking.

“ When King Etheldred^p was dead, his brother, who hitherto, during the life of his brothers, had been of secondary rank, succeeded to the entire sovereignty of Wessex in the year of our Lord 873, and he was the first of all the kings of England who received regal unction, which was administered to him, as it is written, by Pope Leo at Rome. That same year the Danes pursued the new king, and came up with him at Walton in Sussex, where King Alfred, in the midst of the fight, fled from the field of battle, and escaped to the wood. From thence he went into Wessex, where he collected all the people of his kingdom, and in a short time had so large an army, consisting of his own subjects and others, that the Danes did not dare to meet him in the field. He then went to attack them in London, where they had taken up their residence: but the Danes, not venturing to give him battle, asked peace of him, and offered to let him choose out of them whatever hostages he pleased, on condition that they should leave his dominions, and never again enter them. On that same day, therefore, the hostages were given, and the Danes leaving London, marched the whole night, and never rested until they reached Exeter, which they surprised and occupied. When King Alfred heard this, he first hanged the hostages, and then followed

^p Another mode of spelling Ethelred.

the Danes with all his army to Exeter. The Danes, hearing that he was coming, abandoned the city, and went as far as Chippenham in Wessex; where they did much damage; plundering the country, and expelling the people from their habitations. But King Alfred came upon them there, and bravely encountered them in a battle, where Hubba the brother of Hinguar^a, and Bruern Bocard, who had first conducted them from Denmark, were both slain, besides many others on both sides. At last the Danes prevailed, and Alfred, who had in too great haste marched against them with too small an army, escaped from the battle in the best manner that he could. The Danes finding the body of Hubba among the slain, buried it amid loud lamentations, and placed over it a mound, which they called Hubbelowe, as it is still so called to this very day in the county of Devon, where it is to be seen^r."

^a An old Chronicle, called Brute of England, [MS. in Bibl. Bodl. inter codd. Digb. num. 185.] mentions Hinguar also among the slain. "And when the Danes fond Hungar and Hubba deid, thei bare theym to a mountain ther bysyde, and made upon hym a logge and lete call it Hubbslugh. And so itt is to this day in Debenshire." HEARNE'S NOTE TO SPELMAN, p. 60. but no confidence can be placed in these English chronicles, which are mere compilations sometimes at third or fourth hand from earlier Latin authorities.

^r Here it must be noted, that it was the common way of burial with the Danes to raise *Tumuli* upon the bodies, of which there were three sorts, [Olai Wormii monum. Dan. p. 40.] the first whereof was with heaps of great stones, which was proper only to their kings. These *Tumuli* were called *Lowes* in the old English language, either from the British word *Llehau*, i. e. locare vel collocare, [see Dr. Davies's Brit. Dictionary;] or from the Saxon word *leg*, *lig*, *lige*, or (according to the pronunciation of the Danes) *loge*, signifying flame. As therefore *bustum* denoted the place where a man was burned and buried, so did our ancestors, in imitation of them, call the place of burial *lowe*, whether the bodies were burned or not. And this latter seems to be the more true etymology; because in Scotland and the Northern

“When the barons of the counties of Somerset, Wilts, and Dorset, heard of the calamity that had befallen their king Alfred, they all assembled in great force at the place where he was; for they were rejoiced to see him safe and sound, having believed that he was dead. Wherefore the king and the barons immediately took counsel about pursuing the Danes, and galloping after them with an immense army all that night, the next morning at the ninth hour they came up with them at Abingdon. Alfred and his men immediately assaulted them, and the battle which ensued was more valorously contested than any they had fought before: but the Danes resisted the English so bravely, that it is impossible to say on which side the loss of life was

parts of England, the flame of any fire is called *low* to this day, the common people [see Sir Will. Dugdale's *Antiq. of Warwicksh.* p. 4. Dr. Skinner's *Etymolog. vocum omnium antiquarum Anglic.* and Mr. Ray's *Collection of English Words not generally used*, Lond. 1691, 8vo. ed. second] usually saying, that the fire lows, when it blazeth or flameth. For which reason Gawin Douglas, bishop of Dunkel, in his old Scotch translation of Virgil's *Æn.* [lib. vii. fol. cliv. b, printed at Lond. MDLIII. 4to.] useth the word in the same sense:

As King Latynus kindyllis on there gyse
 Apoun the Altaris for the Sacrifice
 The clere chidis [*corrected schidis by Junius in his copy in
 Bibl. Bodl.*] of the dry fyre brandis.
 Quhare that also by hir fader standis
 Lavinia the maid, his douchter fare,
 Ane selcouth thing to se, in hir hare
 It semyth the hate fyre kindillit bricht,
 And hir gay cleithing, all with *lowis* licht
 Gan glete and sperkilland, birn up in ane bleis.

And for the same reason without doubt it is that *law* signifies an hill amongst the hither Scotchmen, as Mr. Camden observes, [Remains, pag. 98.] *SPELMAN'S LIFE OF ALFRED*, p. 61, note.

greatest. Thus the English, after having slain many of their enemies, were now reduced in numbers and broken down by eight battles fought this same year*."

The relation of events which follow, for three or four years, in the Chronicle of Bampton, does not greatly differ from the accounts which other writers have given, and with which the reader has already been made acquainted: after these follows the account of the capture of Wareham and Exeter, with the subsequent march and surprisal of Chippenham in 878, or, as the writer erroneously places it, in 877.

"The Danes from Warham, as they were going by sea to join their companions in Exeter, lost their ships in a storm. Part of them, however, surprised the royal villa of Chippenham with the adjoining territory, after they had either reduced to submission or driven away many of the inhabitants. About the same time, A.D. 877, which was the fifth year of King Alfred's life, the same king was leading an uncertain and disturbed life in the woodlands of Somersetshire†."

The first thing which will be noticed in the foregoing narrative of Brompton, is the error in chronology which it presents. Alfred succeeded to the crown in 871, not in 873: and a similar error of being one year behind the true date, runs through all the intervening dates up to the surprisal of Chippenham and the flight of Alfred, which are placed in 877, instead of 878, the year in which they really happened.

In the next place we must remark the statement of the writer, that in the first year of King Alfred's reign eight battles had been fought, by which the Saxons were completely exhausted. Now several of the other writers

* Brompton, in Twysden, p. 809.

† Brompton, p. 811.

have recorded, that eight, some say nine, great battles were fought in the year 871, when Alfred ascended the throne. It is not certain that the chroniclers have intended to record the names of all the eight; but it is certain, that five of them, Englefield, Reading, Ashdown, Basing, and Merton, were fought in the early part of the year, whilst Ethelred was still alive. We may also observe, that for Wilton in Wiltshire, where, according to all the earlier writers, Alfred fought his first battle after he became king, Brompton has substituted Walton in Sussex. It is agreed too by all preceding writers, that it was soon after the battle of Wilton, probably in consequence of Alfred's army being reinforced, as Brompton relates it, that the Danes came to terms with the Saxons, and in the beginning of 872 vacated Wessex, and took up their quarters at London. It is immediately after the mention of the affair at Wilton that the chroniclers sum up the eight battles, besides skirmishes, which had been fought during that year. Following this statement, Turner has remarked, that the engagement at Wilton "was the ninth great battle which had been fought this year in West-Saxony". What then, it may be asked, becomes of the infraction of the treaty, the march of the Danish army to Exeter, the hanging of the hostages, the march to Chippenham, or the battles of Chippenham and Abingdon? Instead of leaving Wessex for Mercia, as we learn the Danes did by the concurrent voice of all the earlier chroniclers, is it credible that they marched to Exeter, that their hostages were hanged for the infraction of the treaty, that Alfred then pursued them to Exeter, from whence they withdrew to Chippenham, and afterwards fought two other great battles, viz. at Chippenham

^u Hist. Anglo-Sax. vol. i. p. 533.

and Abingdon, before they left the dominions of the West-Saxons? The surprisal of Exeter and the subsequent occupation of Chippenham took place, as we know, in 877-8, but not, we may be assured, in 871 also: the parallel is too close: it has happened but rarely, in the history of the world, that two battles, even at long intervals, have been fought upon the same field: but I cannot believe that the system of operations on which the Danes proceeded in 878 was identically the same as that which they had followed in 871, only seven years before. The supposition would militate against both the prudence of King Alfred, against probability, which in all human things is the surest test of truth, and against the positive testimony of preceding and contemporary writers. It is not by such strange accounts as this that the confusions of Brompton may be allowed to supply the silence of his predecessors. In the narratives of Asser, Ethelwerd, and the rest, there is no room for two severe battles and a long campaign to have intervened between the fight at Wilton and the evacuation of Mercia. The battles at Chippenham and at Abingdon, if we may take Brompton's own account of them, were much more serious than either the conflict of Basing, of Merton, or of Wilton, and could hardly have been excluded from a narrative, into which those three had been admitted. Yet we find no notice has been taken by either of the six chronicles of the battles of Chippenham and Abingdon among the events of 871. Moreover, Brompton himself, when he comes to 877, the year in which the Danes left Wessex for so brief a period after their second invasion, and again attacked it for the third time, so overwhelmingly, in 878, again travels over the same ground, and accom-

panies the Danes to Exeter, where by treaty made with the king they agree to leave his dominions; but instead of doing so, they soon after surprise Chippenham, and bring on the king and his subjects the calamities which are known then to have befallen them. Here, however, Brompton is remarkably brief, even more so than his predecessors; and when he proceeds to tell us, that Alfred led an unquiet life among the woodlands of Somersetshire, the connection of the story is broken, and the mind meets with a shock as if it would recoil from an issue of things so little to be expected from any preceding events. If we suppose that our chronicler, who is not generally very accurate in his dates or even in his facts, has mistaken the year in which the battles of Chippenham and Abingdon occurred, all becomes comparatively intelligible, and the disasters of the king flow no longer from some mysterious source, but from the overwhelming opposition which he had to encounter, and from the defeat which he met with in two great battles, fought one after the other, with all the skill of an able general, and the fortitude of a brave soldier, against odds that were irresistible.

If we are required to account for this curious preservation of so important a fact in the work of so late a writer, and misplaced also in that work, I can only reply, that there are many instances of facts being preserved by single writers, some of them of a much later period than the events which they relate. If this were the place for such a disquisition, it would be easy to shew, that every chronicler of the Middle Ages has recorded at least one fact peculiar to himself. We know that Brompton in his work has handed down to us the most complete, if not the only, copy of King

Alfred's laws ; and it is far from improbable that he should also have preserved to us the memory of the battles of Chippenham and Abingdon*, as fought by Alfred in the beginning of the year 878, when his troops were overwhelmed by numbers, his hopes apparently crushed, and he fled, with a few nobles, knights, and common soldiers, into the woods and morasses, which at that time covered the length of fifty miles in Somersetshire.

* A second and very legitimate enquiry would be, whether Brompton has not written Abendune instead of Edandune. If so, the battle at Abingdon, which he relates, and the battle of Ethandune, which he omits, are one and the same.

CHAP. XV.

OF THE DISEASE WHICH SEIZED ALFRED AT HIS WEDDING—CHARGES
AGAINST ALFRED'S CHARACTER INVESTIGATED—REFLECTIONS OF
TURNER AND SPELMAN ON THAT SUBJECT.

IT is generally believed, on the authority of Asser, who was Alfred's bishop, biographer, and friend, that our great king suffered much, through the whole of his life, from some internal disease, the nature of which was unknown to the physicians of his time. To enquire into the nature of this complaint seems useless, because science alone could explain it to us, and at that time the medical science, perhaps, was at its lowest ebb: and it is more consistent with the dignity of a name, that has always borne on it a halo of reverence in the eyes of mankind, to touch with a gentle hand the infirmities from which even the body of the great Alfred was not exempted by his Creator. It is sufficient for our purpose to observe, that although the original disease, which he had borne about him, as we have already related, from his childhood, left him whilst he was still a youth, yet the relief was but temporary: for when his nuptials were, in 868, "honourably celebrated in Mercia, among innumerable multitudes of people of both sexes," his former disease was replaced by another, which incessantly tormented him night and day, from the twentieth year of his age until his death. "If ever,"

says Asser, "he was relieved, by God's mercy, from this infirmity for a single day and night, yet the fear and dread of that terrible malady never left him, but rendered him almost useless, as he thought, for every duty, whether human or divine!" The approach of this afflicting complaint was also as sudden as its effects were lasting: the wedding ceremony, as is natural, was solemnized with great splendour, and with fastings which lasted night and day, when, on a sudden, in the presence of all the people, the young prince was seized with immediate and excruciating pains, so that no one, either of those who were then present, or who afterwards witnessed the effects of his disorder, during the many years that he suffered from it, could either discover its origin, or devise a remedy. "For many thought that this was occasioned by the favour and fascination of the people^b around him; others, by some spite of the devil, who is ever jealous of the good; and some believed that it was an unusual kind of fever." Yet such was the vigour of Alfred's mind, such the submission of his body to the control of his powerful intellect and will, that the malady, from which he suffered, seems never, after its first access, to have gained dominion over him, or to have displayed itself in public. On the contrary, his energy of mind was, if possible, sharpened by the warnings of his bodily tormentor. Nor does his disease seem to have affected even the vigour of his body. An invalid can with difficulty go through the hardships of an ordinary campaign in war.

^b The belief in fascination has prevailed in all ages and countries: thus Virgil;

Nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinat agnos.

It is connected with the belief in magic. Did it arise from any obscure manifestations of Animal Magnetism?

But what did not Alfred encounter during the many years that he upheld, first by the side of his brave brother, and afterwards alone, the tottering condition of the West-Saxon monarchy? We have traced his reign, as minutely as our authorities will permit, through seven years, and three Danish invasions, each more formidable than the preceding. Twice the wave of conquest was thrown back from the rock on which it beat; and though at its third flow that rock was submerged by the increasing mass of waters which assailed it, yet Alfred still floated above the tide, and served as a buoy on which the eyes of his people were fixed, that they might regain their footing, and repel the hostile inundation.

It has been said by some writers, that Alfred was without a fault. If it were so, he would be no longer to be regarded as a man, but as an especial creation of the Deity, free, in his nature, from all those spots that humanity is apt to derive from the hard and unpropitious circumstances in which it is placed. But a specific catalogue of charges has been drawn up against him, and of such a nature, that they demand investigation. It has been thought, that in his early years, and until the seventh year of his reign, Alfred shewed an inclination to indulge in three odious vices, drunkenness, voluptuousness, and tyranny. If these vices may with truth be laid at the door of Alfred, they must seriously detract from a character which in other respects is bright and shining: the first of these propensities would sink him for a time to a level with the brute creation; the second would imply, that he had less prudence and self-control than the rest of his conduct leads us to

* Dr Whitaker, in his *St. Neot*, is indignant that any one should find imperfections in the character of Alfred.

ascribe to him ; but the last of those imperfections is of odious import, and implies a character which nothing can redeem, not even that experience of adversity, which has so often taught wisdom, after all other schoolings have failed : it shews an inherent incapacity to discriminate between what is just and unjust ; and justice is the noblest virtue that enlightens the path of mankind !

The charges to which allusion has been made, may be all, I believe, traced to their proper origin. The first of them may briefly be dispatched. It is said that the disease which came on Alfred at his wedding was occasioned by his intemperance at those continual feastings, which were kept up for a time, night and day. If the young man, then in his twentieth year, suffered himself to be overtaken by inebriety, we need not stop to comment on so ordinary an event ; for there are few persons, and those few not generally the most amiable or most brilliant, who have not committed the same fault as Alfred. But to attribute to this excess the origin of his disease, is more than we can venture even to suggest ; for he was known to have had the same or a similar complaint at an age before a taste for inebriety usually begins to shew itself. We may therefore limit the inculpations of Alfred's character to two specific charges, of voluptuousness and tyranny ; and these, I believe, will be found to have no better foundation than some reflections which Asser has made on the sudden downfall of the king, when Guthrum, Osketil, and Amund poured their impetuous troops into Wessex in January, A. D. 878.

“ The Almighty not only granted to the same glorious king victories over his enemies, but also permitted him to be harassed by them, to be sunk down

by adversities, and depressed by the low estate of his followers, to the end that he might learn that there is one Lord of all things, to whom every knee doth bow, and in whose hand are the hearts of kings; who puts down the mighty from their seat, and exalteth the humble; who suffers his servants, when they are elevated and at the summit of prosperity, to be touched by the rod of adversity, that in their humility they may not despair of God's mercy, nor in their prosperity boast of their honours, but may also know, to whom they owe all the things which they possess.

“We may believe that the calamity was brought upon the king aforesaid, because, in the beginning of his reign, when he was a youth, and influenced by youthful feelings, he would not listen to the petitions which his subjects made to him for help in their necessities, or for relief from those who oppressed them; but he repulsed them from him, and paid no heed to their requests. This particular gave much annoyance to the holy man Saint Neot, who was his relation, and often foretold to him, in the spirit of prophecy, that he would suffer great adversity on this account; but Alfred neither attended to the reproof of the man of God, nor listened to his true prediction. Wherefore, seeing that a man's sins must be corrected either in this world or the next, the true and righteous Judge was willing that his sin should not go unpunished in this world, to the end that he might spare him in the world to come. From this cause, therefore, the aforesaid Alfred often fell into such great misery, that sometimes none of his subjects knew where he was, or what had become of him.”

The writer, who has of late years most successfully treated of Anglo-Saxon History, supposes, that in this

passage is to be found the origin of Alfred's degradation, when, his tyranny having alienated his people, he fled to the woods and marshes of Somersetshire. But is it not obvious, that the evils which befel Alfred, are said to have occurred more than once? Is it not observable, that he "*often* fell into such misery, that sometimes none of his subjects knew where he was, or what had become of him?" The whole sentence, also, seems to contradict what Asser himself had before told, that after the march of the Danes to Chippenham, King Alfred fled, not alone, but in company "with a few of his nobles, and certain knights and vassals," into the woodlands of the county of Somersetshire. It is not probable that Alfred fled *alone* from Chippenham, whether a battle was fought there or not, but it is extremely probable, that he was accompanied by a small body of men, who afterwards formed the nucleus of an army, and that, during his retreat, the greater part of his subjects were left in the dark about the place of his residence, or his intended movements. We must not forget, that Asser was an ecclesiastic, and lived in an age of superstition, when all events were ascribed to the immediate agency of the Almighty, or, sometimes, to the interposition of the devil. The monastic writers seize on every opportunity of attributing extraordinary events to the agency of Heaven: hence the whole catalogue of legends and miracles with which their writings are filled. That Alfred may have acted, when a young man, with less consideration than he ought, in repulsing the petitions of his subjects, rests upon the authority of Asser, as we have given it; nor is it possible on actual evidence to contradict his assertion; but to extend its effects, and to make it the basis of

national defeat, after a long interval of seven years, during which there was many an occasion for deserting their king, if his subjects had been so minded, seems to be too large a structure to erect upon so small a foundation.

But the good bishop blends his praise and blame somewhat promiscuously; and without remembering the age of the young man, who is the subject of his remarks. When Alfred suffered from the first disease, which he got rid of, as they tell us, by prayer in the Church of Cornwall, he could have been not more, perhaps, than sixteen years old^d.

At this early age, if we may believe Asser, "he wished to strengthen his mind in the observance of God's commandments, for he perceived that he could with difficulty abstain from gratifying his carnal desires; and because he feared the anger of God, if he should do any thing contrary to his will, he used often to rise in the morning at cock-crow, and go to pray in the Churches, and at the relics of the Saints^e." So precocious an instance of early piety is indeed unusual, and the young prince may have been thought unlikely, with such a monitor in his bosom, to fall into the vices with which he was charged. But it will set this subject in a clearer point of view, if we examine some more witnesses, whose writings have kept alive through a thousand years, not without additions and changes of their own, the unlucky remarks in which Asser innocently indulged about the character of his favourite king.

^d For he was only twenty years old when he married: and before then he had suffered from his first disease, and at last got rid of it.

^e Asser, anno 884.

The Saxon Chronicle—that venerable relic of English antiquity—says nothing on the subject; and its silence is the more remarkable, because it is almost certain that the events preceding 890 were written by Plegmund, (who was made archbishop by Alfred,) or at all events by Plegmund's command. The next authority, Ethelwerd, also says nothing about the faults either of tyranny or want of self-control, which Alfred evinced during the early years of his reign. The other three chroniclers, Simeon, Florence, and Henry of Huntingdon, are equally silent; and the first ancient documents which contain a reference to the charges in question are some biographies of St. Neot, supposed to have been written before the Norman Conquest. That full force may be given to these authorities, and the argument which has been drawn from them, I shall quote, at some length, the words of the historian, who first brought them to light, and applied them to the elucidation of this obscure period of Alfred's life.

“To understand this obscure incident”—Alfred's flight and seclusion—“it is necessary to notice some charges of misconduct, which have been made against Alfred. The improprieties alluded to are declared to have had political consequences, and have been connected with his mysterious seclusion. It may be most impartial to review the traditional imputations in all their extent, and then to consider, from the confessions of Asser, how much it is reasonable to believe or to reject.

“An ancient life of Saint Neot, a kinsman of Alfred, exists in Saxon¹, which alludes, though vaguely, to

¹ “It is in MS. in the Cotton Library, *Vespasian*, D. 14, intituled, ‘*Vita Sancti Neoti Saxonice*.’ It follows an account of *Furseus*, an East-Anglian Saint, and some religious essays of *Elfric*, all in Saxon.

some impropriety in the king's conduct. It says, that Neot chided him with many words, and spoke to him prophetically: 'O king, much shalt thou suffer in this life; hereafter so much distress thou shalt abide, that no man's tongue may say it all. Now, loved child, hear me if thou wilt, and turn thy heart to my counsel: depart entirely from thine unrighteousness, and thy sins with alms redeem, and with tears abolish^g.'

"Another ancient MS. life of Saint Neot^h is somewhat stronger in its expressions of reproach. It states, 'that Neot, reproving his bad actions, commanded him to amend; that Alfred, not having wholly followed the rule of reigning justly, pursued the way of depravityⁱ: that one day when the king came, Neot sharply reproached him for the wickedness of his tyranny, and the proud austerity of his government.'

As Elfric wrote the lives of many Saints in Saxon, it is most probably his composition."

^g "After mentioning that Alfred came to Neot, emb his sawle thearfe, it adds, he hine eac threade manega worden, and him to cw' mid fore witegunge. "Eala thu king, micel scealt thu tholigen on thissen life, on than towearden time swa micle angsumnisse thu gebiden scealt tha nan mœnnisc tunge hit eall asecgen ne mœig. Nu leof bearn gehor me gif thu wilt, and thine heorte to mine rede gecerre. Gewit eallinge fram thiura unrichtwisnisse, and thine sinnen mid ælnessen ales et mid tearen adigole." MSS. Vespas. p. 145. From Asser's expressions, (ut in Vita Sancti patris Neoti legitur,) it seems that a life of Neot had been written before Asser died. The Saxon life above quoted seems to be an epitome of some more ancient one. In this manner Elfric epitomized Abbo's life. See MSS. JUL. E. 7."

^h "This is a MS. in the Cotton Library, Claudius, A. 5. It is in Latin, and is intituled, 'Vita Sancti Neoti per Will. Abbatem Croylandensem, an. 1180.'"

ⁱ "Pravos etiam ejus redarguens actus jussit in melius converti—nondum ad plenum recte regnandi normam assequutus, viam deseruerat pravitatis." CLAUD. MS. 154.

It declares, that Neot foresaw and foretold his misfortunes. 'Why do you glory in your misconduct? Why are you powerful but in iniquity? you have been exalted, but you shall not continue; you shall be bruised like the ears of wheat. Where then will be your pride? If that is not yet excluded from you, it soon shall be. You shall be deprived of that very sovereignty, of whose vain splendour you are so extravagantly arrogant^k.'

"It is in full conformity with these two lives of Neot, that those others written by Ramsay in the twelfth century^l express also inculcations of Alfred. The life composed in prose states, that Neot chided him severely for his iniquitous conduct. 'You shall be deprived of that kingdom in which you are swelling; in which you are so violently exercising an immoderate tyranny. But, if you withdraw yourself from your cruel vices and inordinate passions, you shall find mercy.'

"The same author's biography, in Latin verse, reproaches the king's conduct as 'dissolute, cruel,

^k "Quadam denique die solemnī venientem ex more de tyrannidis improbitate et de superba regiminis austeritate acriter eum increpavit Neotus.—Apponebat ei Sanctum David—regum mansuetissimum et omnibus humilitatis exemplar—afferebat et Saulem superbia reprobatum. Spiritu attactus prophetico, futura ei prædixit infortunia. 'Quid gloriaris,' inquit, 'in malitia? Quid potens es in iniquitate, elevatus es ad modicum et non subsistes, et sicut summitates spicarum conteris? Ubi est gloriatio tua? at si nondum exclusa est, aliquando tamen excludetur. Ipso enim regiminis principatu, cujus inani gloriatione te ipsum excedendo superbis, in proximo privaberis,' &c. Ms. CLAUD. p. 154."

^l "Dr. Whitaker has printed these from two MSS. at Oxford; one at the Bodleian, the other in Magdalen College; in the Appendix to his St. Neot. He thought them the oldest lives of St. Neot now known. The two, which I have already quoted, are, however, more ancient, especially the Saxon, which preceded the Norman Conquest.

proud, and severe.' It adds, that the king promised to correct himself, but did not; but only added to his misdeeds, and became worse. That Neot again reproved him for 'wandering in depraved manners,' and announced his impending calamities.

"The same ideas are repeated in the fourteenth century by Matthew of Westminster in his history, in phrases like those of Ramsay; and John of Tinmouth, about the same period, reiterates the charge in the language of the Claudius MS. Another writer of a Chronicle, Wallingford, asserts that Alfred, in the beginning of his reign, indulged in luxury and vice; and that the amendment of his conduct was a consequence of his adversity^m."

So much, then, for the charges of tyranny and personal excess, which have been brought against Alfred's character; and I confess that they are not so strongly made out as to convince me that the king can be justly accused of them. Let us next enquire in what manner these faults, if he committed them, could have contributed to the calamities which he suffered at the period to which our history has brought us. The same writer, who has so fully developed the accusations against the king, shall shew, in his own words, how they affected his fortunes at this crisis.

^m See pp. 535, 536, of Wallingford's Chronicle, printed in the third volume of Gale and Fell's Collection of English Historians. His words surpass all that preceding Chroniclers have ventured to hint about the indiscretions of the king. "*Nihil, ut Christiani est, de Christi passionibus in corpore suo vel portavit vel portare curavit, sed e contra virgines et caste vivere volentes, suæ luxuriæ, vel invitas vel voluntaneas, subdere omni studio festinavit.*" It is to be hoped, that this account fully merits the contempt with which Dr. Lingard treats it.

See Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, vol. i. p. 543, &c.

"Asser," he observes, "connects with the hints about his faults, an intimation, that, in this important crisis of his life, he suffered from the disaffection of his subjects." It is expressed obscurely, but the words are of strong import. He says, 'The Lord permitted him to be very often wearied by his enemies, afflicted by adversity, and to be depressed by the *contempt of his people*.' He adds to these phrases, the paragraph already quoted about his faults, and ends the subject by declaring, '*Wherefore* he fell often into such misery, that none of his subjects knew where he was, or what had befallen him'."

"Asser had already declared, that, on the invasion of Godrun, many fled into exile; and that, 'for the greatest part, all the inhabitants of that region submitted to his dominion.' The inference, which seems naturally to result from all his [*these?*] passages is, that Alfred had offended his people, and in this trying emergency was betrayed by them. Other authors also declare, that it was their flight or disaffection which produced his^p."

The Chronicle of Melrose, as quoted by the same writer in a note, says, that Alfred, "*by reason of the flight of his men*, was left with only a few attendants, and concealed himself in the woods^q."

Wallingford is more specific: "King Alfred," says

^p "Verum etiam ab hostibus fatigari, adversitatibus affligi, despectu suorum deprimi, multoties eum idem benignus Dominus permisit."

^q "Quare ergo idem sæpeditus Ælfredus in tantam miseriam sæpius incidit, ut nemo subjectorum suorum sciret, ubi esset vel quo devenisset."

^p Turner, vol. i. p. 550.

^q "Fugientibus suis cum paucis relictus est et in memoribus se abscondebat." CHRON. MAIL. p. 144.

he, "chose rather to yield to the spirit of prophecy," in allusion, I suppose, to the warnings of St. Neot, "than, *with the certainty of disunion among his men,* to march and meet the Danes in their fury'."

Ingulf adds, "Alfred was at last reduced to so low a state, that the three counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Somersetshire alone were *with difficulty* retained in their allegiance'."

"We have endeavoured," continues Mr. Turner, "to account for the neglect of his subjects mentioned by Asser, but he is also charged with cruelty and severity in the ancient lives of St. Neot. On this we may recollect some of his judicial punishments, which are mentioned in the old law-book, called the 'Mirroir des Justices,' written by Andrew Horne in the reign of Edward the Second. He quotes in this work, Rolls in the time of King Alfred, and among many other inflictions of the king's love of justice, he mentions several executions, which appear to have been both summary and arbitrary, and, according to our present notions, cruelly severe. It is true, that the minds and habits of every part of society were in those times so violent, that our estimation of the propriety of these judicial severities cannot now be accurately just. But yet, even with this recollection, the capital punishments, with which Alfred is stated to have visited the judicial errors, corruptions, incapacity, dishonesty, and violence, which are recorded in the

' "Rex vero Alfredus elegit prophetiæ spiritui cedere quam cum certo suorum dissidio sævientibus occurrere." p. 537.

' "Ad tantam tandem exilitatem deductus est ut tribus pagis Hantouiensi, Wiltoniensi, et Somersata *ægre in fide* retentis," &c. p. 46.

Mirror, strike our moral feeling as coming within the expressions of the "immoderate tyranny," which he is said to have at first exhibited.

"That Alfred should desire the improvement of his people, was the natural result of his own improving mind. But, if he at first attempted to effect this by violence, and to precipitate, by pitiless exertions of power, that melioration which time and adapted education, laws, example, and institutions, only could produce, he acted with as much real tyranny as if he had shed their blood from the common passions of ordinary despots; but his motives must not be confounded with theirs: he meant well, though he may have acted in this respect injudiciously. Yet no motive can make crime not criminal. However men may palter with the question to serve temporary purposes, no end justifies bad means. Cruelty and violence are always evils, and tend to produce greater ones than those which they correct. We may therefore understand from the examples mentioned by Horne, that even Alfred's better purposes, thus executed, may have attached to the beginning of his reign the charges of tyranny and cruelty, and may have produced the temporary aversion of his people. They could not appreciate his great objects. They saw what they hated. They probably misconceived, for a time, his real character, and by their alienation may have contributed to amend it. Virtue, without intending it, will often act viciously from ignorance, prejudice, wrong advice, or undue alarm. Wisdom must unite with virtue to keep it from wrong conduct or deterioration; but true wisdom arises from the best human and divine tuition, and the gradual concurrence

of experience. Alfred possessed these in the latter part of his life, but in its earlier periods had not attained them¹."

To comment upon these just remarks would be superfluous, nor is it necessary to shew that they can hardly apply, by way of explanation, to the obscure events of January, February, and March, 878, if the reader shall consider that I have discovered in the Chronicle of Brompton the narrative of a battle, which was the more efficient instrument of Alfred's discomfiture. If therefore I trespass a little longer upon the patience of my reader, it will be to lay before him the reflections of Spelman upon this subject, rather as a matter of curiosity, than as if it were essential to this delineation of Alfred's life. And yet it may be productive of benefit to the minds of many; for there are numerous individuals, in the variety of the human race, who will turn over and over again that which is in its nature incomprehensible or obscure, and will quit the examination, apparently satisfied, though they have gained no additional knowledge by the enquiry. The reflections of Spelman upon Alfred's supposed improprieties as a king are these: "Howsoever otherwise of great merit and eminent virtues, yet, as of himself he had no great desire to the crown, so neither could he, in the beginning of his reign, well frame himself to attend the function of so great a charge, his vehement affectation of literature, (to which he had so natural an inclination, and so little means of satisfaction,) his desire of knowledge and experience, in all the faculties of an universal wit; and again his hawking, hunting, and other exercises, to which his youth, and the active move of mind than body, did incline him, and in which

¹ Turner, vol. i. p. 550.

he was ever inventing or experimenting something or other, these in that vacancy of molestation (which after the battle of Wilton he for a year or two had at the beginning of his reign) so much took up his mind and thoughts, as that he but a little attended to the occasions and complaints of his poor subjects. And though (as they say) he were often admonished thereof by one Neotus, a kinsman of his, of reverend esteem in those days for exemplary life and holiness, yet so little did it work upon him, as that the holy man, having much lamented the king's averseness, sorrow at length resolving itself into a spirit of prophecy, foretold the king what crosses and afflictions he should for that cause certainly encounter: that he should be deprived of his kingdom, and live as it were an exile in his own country. And these, howsoever predicted, did assuredly (by the consent of all that have writ his actions) now abundantly befall the king^a."

^a Life of Alfred, p. 60.

CHAP. XVI.

OF ALFRED'S LIFE IN THE WILDS AND MARSHES OF SOMERSETSHIRE —
ADVENTURE OF THE CAKES—LANDING OF THE DANES IN DEVONSHIRE
—DEFEAT OF THE DANES, AND DEATH OF HUBBA—ST. CUTHBERT
SAID TO HAVE APPEARED TO ALFRED IN THE SHAPE OF A PILGRIM.

THE defeat of Alfred's army at Chippenham brought the fortunes of the king to the lowest ebb. The field of battle lay at some distance within the frontier of Wessex, and the enemy was almost in the centre of the kingdom. Knowing also the skill and resources of Alfred, who required but a few days to repair his losses and again to be ready for battle, the Danes shewed the most extraordinary eagerness to capture him, and pursued him with such energy, that escape seemed almost hopeless. There could, however, be no hesitation in the king's mind where he should take refuge, and endeavour to rally and reinforce his discomfited soldiers. The eastern part of his kingdom, consisting of the counties of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, were recent acquisitions of his father Ethelwolf^a, and may be supposed to have entertained but a lukewarm allegiance towards a king to whom they were bound by the ties of conquest rather than of affection. Perhaps also from other causes, which are unknown to us, there was no hope for Alfred from the east, but behind him lay the extensive peninsula compre-

^a See page 27.

hending the counties of Somerset, Dorset, and part of Devon, still faithful to his cause, and perhaps also not much the worse for the Danish invasions, which had either not reached to them, or had left but slight impression. Within ten miles of the battle-field was the forest of Selwood, occupying a large tract of country, in which the town of Frome and several others of much consequence are now situated. Behind the forest lay the mountainous district of Mendip, the fastnesses of which were once of a fearful character, and may be the better understood from the fact, that within the memory of persons still living, the communication between one place and another has been impeded by many difficulties, and in certain seasons of the year, if the weather is severe, has been altogether cut off. That Alfred should enter this great forest, with such troops as he could keep together, or whose fidelity led them to share the fortunes of their king, is in no wise remarkable in any age, where the inhabitants are engaged in a contest for their lives and possessions against a superior invading host: still less may we wonder that such a course should be adopted, at a time when the science of war was imperfect, the modes of destruction more simple, and the whole system of a desultory and predatory character, and based upon no established principles. But the flight of Alfred from his royal villa of Chippenham is as indistinctly and as differently told as all the other particulars of his life, and it is almost hopeless that we shall ever arrive at the exact truth of these most interesting events. But we must not shrink from examining all that has been left to enlighten this obscure subject; for, if we have but few data to guide us, it is consolatory to reflect, that nothing in history is

better attested, than that there is some basis of truth in the story before us. It is certain that the West-Saxon kingdom was brought to the verge of subjection to a cruel foe, by whom nearly all the north of Europe was subdued, and that the abilities and vigour of Alfred alone reinstated it, and restored it to victory and to independence. The contemporary records of this crisis are few and brief, because the pen was at that time a feeble instrument to record the acts, whether of glory or of shame, which form the annals of mankind. But the transactions of the year 878 were handed down through the mouths of the people, as well as by the pen of the writer; they have been attested and panegyricized by a hundred chroniclers, who, living in different ages, have delighted to recapitulate his deeds, and have enlarged, with a loquaciousness, which is not only pardonable but praiseworthy, on his warlike achievements, his wisdom, his laws, his writings, and even on the defeats and vicissitudes of his chequered career.

In examining the ancient chroniclers, which come nearest to the event itself, it is not a little remarkable that their most ancient authorities do not support the popular belief, as regards the place in which the king concealed himself and his few followers. It is most explicitly stated by all the six earliest writers, that the isle of Athelney was the place, not where he at first concealed himself, but where he afterwards constructed a fortress^b. The short narrative, which has been already quoted from Asser, contains almost all that we know about the first few weeks of his retirement; nor do the extracts which Turner has given us from the two ancient biographies of St. Neot, afford us

^b Sax. Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

much additional information, though they are the first documents which make no distinction between the preceding period of the king's exile, and his subsequent erection of a stronghold in Athelney. The oldest of these, which is in Saxon, says of the king, that when the army of the Danes approached, "he was soon lost; he took flight, and left all his warriors, and his commanders, and all his people, his treasures and his treasure-vessels, and preserved his life. He went hiding over hedges and ways, woods and wilds, till through the Divine guidance he came safe to the isle of Athelney^c."

The second of these manuscripts, in Latin, gives the following account of the same event. "The king, hearing that the rage and cruelty of the barbarians were rushing immediately upon him, and considering the dispersion of his people, began to fluctuate to and fro in his mind. At length, yielding to his discreeter judgment, he retired from his enemies alone and unarmed, and exposed to be the sport of flight. As he was entirely ignorant whither he should turn himself, or where the necessity of his flight should impel him, he let fortune lead him, and came unexpectedly into a place surrounded on all sides with extensive marshes. This place was in the extreme boundary of England, on the borders of Britain^d, which, in their

^c "Tha se here swa stithlic wæs, and swa neh Englelande, he sone forthirht, fleames cepte, his cempen ealle forlet and his heretogen and eall his theode, madmes and madmfaten and his life gebearh. Ferde tha lutigende geond heges and thegen, geound thudes and theldes, swa tha he thurh Godes wissunge gesund become to Ætheling-eye. Mss. BRIT. Mus. Vesp. D. 14." Turner, i. 553, 4.

^d i. e. Cornwall, called Britain from the Britons who inhabited it.

language, is called *Ethelingai*, and in ours (Latin) means the royal island*.”

I do not attach much importance to these accounts, though they help to fill up the circle of evidence, as having been written at a very early period: but the writings, in which they occur, being biographies of Saints, are of a suspicious character, not so much for their historical inaccuracy, where there was no motive to depart from the truth, but from their declamatory nature. The paragraphs themselves are manifestly declamatory, and communicate no fresh fact, beyond the flight of Alfred, and that he fled alone. But those, who may have learnt the story† from the lips of Alfred himself, tell us that he did not flee alone; for he was accompanied by a “few nobles, knights, and soldiers.” Ethelwerd also, the chronicler, whose princely birth and connection with Alfred’s family may have made him acquainted with many facts, though they did not enable him to relate them in very intelligible Latin, has distinctly said, that “Ethelnoth, duke of Somerset, was in a certain wood with a small band,” and afterwards constructed the fortress for the king: he must therefore have been in Alfred’s company, or in his immediate neighbourhood; for it may have been prudent that the king’s faithful adherents should separate at times, both to procure subsistence, and also to elude the vigilance of the enemy. On this head, I am willing to adopt the remarks of Spelman, though they are based rather upon his just conception how the king would act, than upon established facts handed down to us by the chroniclers.

“During the time that the king (thus overpowered,

* Claudius, A. 5. p. 157.

† Asser, for example.

with those ever-increasing multitudes of Danes) was forced to withdraw and shelter himself from the open violence of such a storm, yet even then, like one as inexhaustible in courage as they in numbers, he, with a small handful of men, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, stealing upon them, often presented himself in so smart demonstrations of his valour, as gave them to understand that, howsoever overlaid with their multitudes, they were not as yet to count him overcome. ‘Alfred, (saith Malmesbury,) even when he was overthrown, and cast down, was always new to be encountered with; so that when one would think him trod to pieces, he, like a snake slipping out of the hands of them that held him, would from his hiding-places on the sudden set upon the triumphing enemy: and after an overthrow, his fury was for the most part insupportable.’”

We have already noticed, in a former chapter^b, on the authority of Asser, that the king and his attendants were obliged to forage for their subsistence, and that he sometimes procured food in the house of one of his own cowherdsⁱ. It was, apparently, in this man’s house that the incident occurred, which is known to every school-boy, and to almost every Englishman above the condition of a peasant. It is, in fact, one of those little incidents, which connect the king upon his throne with the plodding rustic, whose labour supplies the monarch with his daily bread. The circumstance is one so simple in itself, and so inartificially told, that the greatest historian, if he had witnessed the fact,

^c Life of Alfred, p. 56.

^b See page 170.

ⁱ We learn from Alfred’s Will, (see Appendix,) that he possessed large landed estates at Burnham and elsewhere in the co. of Somerset.

could hardly have told it better. Yet it is not known on what authority the anecdote is related, and there is a slight variation in the mode of telling it, not perhaps greater than will be found in the narrative of much more important events than this. The first account of this anecdote occurs in Asser's biography; but the passage (like many others) does not appear in several manuscript copies of that work; it is found in another similar work, called Asser's Annals, or the Chronicle of St. Neot's, so named by Leland, who discovered it in that monastery. It has been asserted that Asser is the author of this work also, but this is a disputed point, for the critics have not been able to decide upon the question. The anecdote in both those works is in the same words.

“It happened on a certain day, that the country-woman, wife of the cowherd, was preparing some loaves to bake, and the king, sitting at the hearth, was making ready his bow and arrows, with other warlike instruments. The unlucky woman, espying the cakes burning at the fire, ran up to remove them, and rebuking the king, exclaimed, ‘Why don’t you turn the cakes, when you see them burning? you will be glad enough to eat them when they are hot.’ The blundering woman little thought that it was King Alfred, who had fought so many battles against the pagans, and gained so many victories over them^k.”

^k Asser, anno 878. “Although in the Cotton MSS. of Asser this passage is wanting, yet it was in Camden’s ancient MSS. and the preceding words ‘apud quendam suum vaccarium’ are in the Cotton MS. Dr. Whitaker, in his usual hasty manner, boldly calls it an interpolation taken from Ramsay’s life of St. Neot, which he has printed. But Dr. W. did not know of the earlier life in the Claud. MS. nor of the still more ancient Saxon life, Vesp. D. 14, both of which contain the incident.” Turner, Hist. Ang. Sax. i. p. 556.

The next notice of this event is found in the Saxon life of St. Neot, before mentioned.

“ Alfred took shelter in a swain’s house, and also him and his evil wife diligently served. It happened that on one day the swain’s wife heated her oven, and the king sat by it, warming himself by the fire. She knew not then that it was the king. Then the evil woman was excited, and spoke to the king with an angry mind: ‘ Turn thou those loaves, that they burn not; for I see daily that thou art a great eater.’ He soon obeyed this evil woman, because she would scold. He then, the good king, with great anxiety and sighing, called to his Lord imploring His pity¹. ”

The Latin life of the same saint^m gives a little more detail. “ Alfred a fugitive, and exiled from his people, came by chance and entered the house of a poor herdsman, and there remained some days concealed, poor and unknown. It happenedⁿ that, on the Sabbath-day, the herdsman as usual led his cattle to their accustomed pastures, and the king remained alone in the cottage with the man’s wife. She, as necessity required, placed a few loaves, which some call loudasⁿ, on a pan with

¹ “ And on sumes swanef huse his hleow gernde and eac swilce him and his ifele wife georne herde. Hit gelamp sume deige tha thaes swanes wif hætte here ofen and se king thor big sæt hleowwinde hine beo than fire. Than heo were niten the he king were. Tha wearth tha ifele wis thæringe, astired and cwæth to than kinge eorre mode, ‘ Wend thu tha hlafes, tha heo ne forbeorner: fortham ic geseo deighamllice tha thu micel æte eart.’ He wæs sone gehersum than ifele wife; forthan the heo nede scolde. He tha, we gode king, mid micelre angsumnisse and siccetunge to his Drihten clipode, his mildse biddende. MSS. Vesp. D. 14.” TURNER, i. p. 556.

^m Mss. Claud. A. 5. p. 157. Also quoted by Turner.

ⁿ This is merely an allusion to the English name ‘ loaves,’ the passage being in Latin.

fire underneath, to be baked for her husband's repast and her own on his return. While she was necessarily busied, like peasants, on other affairs, she went anxious to the fire, and found the bread burning on the other side. She immediately assailed the king with reproaches: 'Why, man, do you sit thinking there, and are too proud to turn the bread? Whatever be your family, with such manners and sloth, what trust can be put in you hereafter? If you were even a nobleman, you will be glad to eat the bread which you neglect to attend to.' The king, though stung by her upbraidings, yet heard her with patience and mildness; and, roused by her scolding, took care to bake her bread as she wished."

This incident is not mentioned by any of the chroniclers who lived within a century before or after the Normans, until we come to Roger de Wendover, whose history was afterwards embodied verbatim into that of Matthew Paris. Roger's account^o is a little more circumstantial than that of Asser, and to the same effect as we find in the Life of St. Neot.

"There is a place on the furthest extremities of the English, towards the west, called Ethelingeye, or the Isle of Nobles, surrounded on every side by marshes, and so inaccessible, that it can be approached only in a boat. The island contains a great grove of alder-trees, wherein are stags, goats, and many animals of that kind: it comprises scarcely two acres of solid ground. To this island came Alfred alone, for in his dejection he left behind him the few soldiers who accompanied him, that he might the better avoid the enemy; and perceiving there a cottage belonging to some unknown

^o Turner has quoted this passage, as if written by Matthew of Westminster, who is a well-known plagiarist, and has copied the account, without altering a word, from Roger de Wendover.

individual, he went up to it, and asked a lodging, which was granted him. For he remained there some days, a stranger and poor, doing what the peasant and his wife told him, and content with the merest necessities. When asked who he was, or what business he had in so lonely a place, he replied, that he was one of the king's servants, who had been defeated with him in battle, and had escaped to this spot from the enemy who were pursuing them. The herdsman, trusting to his words, took pity on him, and carefully supplied him with the necessities of life. Now it happened that the herdsman went out one day, as usual, to drive his pigs to the place where they fed, leaving the king at home with his wife. The good woman had placed some loaves by the fire under the ashes to bake, and whilst intent on other business, she saw the loaves burning, upon which she said indignantly to the king, "Why don't you move the loaves, when you see them burning? you will be glad to eat them when they are hot^p." The king, with a downcast look, and stung by the woman's reproaches, not only turned the loaves, but also gave them back to the woman well baked and without blemish."

The peasant, into whose rustic life fortune interwove this golden episode, will again recur to our notice in a future part of this work. His name, we learn from Florence of Worcester, was Denulf^q.

The anecdote is clearly the same, under all the versions in which it has been handed down to us; and we may

^p It is remarkable, that the housewife's rebuke of the king consists of two Latin hexameter verses, both in Asser, Roger de Wendover, and Matthew of Westminster:

Urere quos cernis panes, girare moraris?

Quum nimium gaudes hos manducare calentes.

^q Yet Florence of Worcester takes no notice of the anecdote of the cakes.

regret that it is the only incident that has been left us of this interesting period of Alfred's life. The humble life which Alfred led with the inhabitants of the rustic farm-house in Somersetshire, and with his companions in the woods, who subsisted by hunting and fishing, was an admirable school for a prince, who was liable, as is said of Alfred in the first part of his reign, to carry his head on high, and to despise the petitions of his people. A king, moreover, who had gained from books a more extensive knowledge of men and things than was usually acquired by others in that age, must have felt much and reflected deeply upon the degradation to which he was reduced. The prince who had led the West-Saxons so often to battle, was at last brought to so low a condition, that he was beholden to a humble farmer, once his own servant, for his daily bread. The few nobles, who had followed him, were obliged to disperse, to procure themselves food. This was a lesson of practical wisdom, not to be found in any of the books which the king had studied so attentively. It may have been delineated in figurative language in some of the verses of that book of Poems, which his mother had given him seventeen years before, but it was now brought home to himself by a catastrophe which fell like a thunderbolt upon him. Though we may justly hesitate to ascribe such events to the visible judgments of Heaven, or to believe that they occur as direct modes of punishment for transgression, yet to the wise man—and Alfred certainly was one—they will always become real blessings to clear the understanding from vain and unprofitable affections, to dispose the will towards the path of prudence, and to strengthen the heart and hands to struggle more effectually with the difficulties which present themselves in life. Neither did this mental discipline come on Alfred too early

or too late for him to benefit by it. He was only twenty-nine years, neither too old and seared to receive the salutary lessons of adversity, nor too young and yielding to retain them, but of that intermediate age, which ushers in the prime and hale period of manhood, when it might be hoped that he would have many years before him to mature his reflections, to bring forth the true fruits of the wisdom which he had gained, and to form that character of himself and of his reign, which he would wish to go down to future ages.

But the residence of Alfred among the cowherds of Somersethire was brought to an end by another vicissitude of fortune, no less sudden than that by which he had been reduced to such straits. Whilst Guthrum and his two fellow-chiefs were in Mercia, the sanguinary Hubba, whose barbarities we have recorded in an earlier part of this work, had invaded South Wales, where he wintered, and made a most miserable slaughter of its inhabitants. It was probably in consequence of a concerted plan between him and Guthrum, that, whilst the latter should suddenly attack Alfred in his royal villa of Chippenham, Hubba, sailing from Wales, should divert the attention of the Saxons, and divide their forces, by a descent on the opposite coast of Devonshire. This division of the Danes, however, did not execute their part of the agreement, until Alfred, defeated at Chippenham, had retreated with his handful of followers into the woods and marshes. The account of their landing and its issue are given by Asser thus.

The brother^r of Hinguar and Halfdene, with twenty-three ships, after much slaughter of the Christians,

^r Supposed to be Hubba, but none of the chroniclers specify him so by name. In the confused narrative of Brompton, he is said to have been slain at Chippenham ; but this is a mistake.

came from the country of Demetia^a, where they had wintered, and sailed to Devon, where, with twelve hundred others^t, he met with a miserable death, being slain while committing his misdeeds, by the king's servants, before the castle of Kynwith^u, into which many of the king's servants, with their followers, had fled for safety. The Pagans, seeing that the castle was altogether unprepared and unfortified, except that it had walls after our own fashion, determined not to assault it, because it was impregnable, and secure on all sides, except on the eastern, as we ourselves have seen; but they began to blockade it, thinking that those who were within would soon surrender, either from famine, or want of water, for the castle had no spring near it. But the result did not fall out as they expected; for the Christians, before they began to suffer from want, inspired by Heaven, judging it best to gain victory or death, attacked the Pagans suddenly in the morning, and from the first cut them down in great numbers, slaying also their king, so that few escaped to their ships; and there the Saxons gained a large booty, and amongst other things captured the standard called the Raven^x; for they say

^a The ancient name of South Wales.

^t The Saxon Chronicle and Huntingdon say 840 men: Ethelwerd 800: Simeon and Florence 1200.

^u The locality of Kinwith or Cynuit is unknown.

^x *Ræfen*, Sax. Aunal. DCCCLXXVIII, but in one copy *hrefn*. "From this famous banner, in all probability, Anlaf, king of Northumberland, afterwards had a raven upon his banner, as appears from a coin published by Sir Andrew Fountaine, tab. iii. And the story of the achievements, performed by the help of it, was so remarkable, that it gave original to a family, RÆFEN being the name of one of the Monetarii in King Canute's coins, (tab. iv.) published by the same ingenious gentleman." SPELMAN'S LIFE OF ALFRED, p. 61.

that the three sisters of Hinguar and Hubba, daughters of Lodbroch, wove that flag, and got it ready in one day. They say, also, that in every battle, wherever that flag went before them, if they were to gain the victory, a live crow would appear flying on the middle of the flag; but if they were doomed to be defeated, it would drop down motionless; and the truth of this was often proved[†]."

The news of this victory spread rapidly through Wessex, and reached the ears of Alfred in his retreat; whilst the Danes were proportionally depressed by the loss of their standard. The nations of the North had always great credulity in the efficacy of charms and spells: and their whole religion was but a tissue of diablerie and magic. The standard of the Raven was considered to be enchanted, and was the oracle of their success or failure: its capture, therefore, by the Christians was an event of no little importance. For with the loss of this sacred emblem, the Danes naturally lost their hopes and their courage, whilst the Saxons, though holding in no account the properties which their prize was supposed to possess, acquired confidence from the triumph which they had gained,

[†] The Saxon Chronicle relates this invasion and its results with great brevity, and, like Asser, mentions neither the name of the Danish invader, the brother of Hinguar and Halden, nor the name of the Saxon general, by whom he was defeated. The latter information is supplied by Ethelwerd, who relates the whole affair thus: "The same year came the brother of Halden and Hinguar, the tyrant, with thirty vessels to the western parts of the English, and besieged Oddan, duke of the province of Devon, in a certain castle, and kindled up a war both within and without: the barbaric king fell, and with him eighty decads." But Ethelwerd most unaccountably adds, that at last, the Danes remained masters of the field of battle!

and entertained new hopes of expelling the invaders, from whom they had so cruelly suffered.

The king now saw that the decisive moment for action was at home. He had been nearly three months^{*} in retirement, waiting for the turn of things which now presented itself. "The same year, after Easter," says Asser,—and Easter-day was on the 23d of March in that year—"King Alfred, with a few followers, made for himself a stronghold in a place called Ethelingaey [Athelney], and from thence sallied with his vassals and the nobles of Somersetshire, to make frequent assaults upon the Pagans." The MS. life of St. Neot, already quoted, and in point of antiquity next to Asser and the Saxon Chronicle, gives the following account, a little more detailed than the former :

"In a few days they constructed a place of defence as well as they could ; and here recovering a little of his strength, and comforted by the protection of his few friends, he began to move in warfare against his enemies. His companions were very few in number, compared with the barbarian multitude ; nor could they, on the first day, or by their first attacks, obtain any advantages ; yet they neither quitted the foe, nor submitted to their defeats, but supported by the hope of victory, as their small number gradually increased, they renewed their efforts, and made one battle but the preparation for another. Sometimes conquerors,

* Yet we find in Spelman's Life of Alfred, [pag. 57.] the following : "A full year well nigh lay Alfred clouded under this adversity of fortune. A long eclipse it was of so great a light, and which in human judgment had been fatal to him, had it not then pleased God to have looked with a more favourable eye upon him : and as He had descended so far as to let him understand his offence and punishment beforehand ; so likewise was He pleased now to let him know that He was pacified towards him, and had determined his restitution."

and sometimes conquered, they learnt to overcome time by chances, and chance by time. The king, both when he failed and when he was successful, preserved a cheerful countenance, and supported his friends by his example*."

The construction of this fort, impracticable perhaps at first, when Alfred's people were still panic-stricken after the battle of Chippenham, may have been suggested to his mind by the success which the brave Earl Odun had gained at Kinwith castle in Devonshire. The Saxons seem to have not been very skilful in the erection of fortresses; and it is remarkable, that there are few instances, in the whole course of their wars with the Danes, of their having reduced those enemies when they had once taken up a safe position within their fortifications. We may observe in history, that every people, who have gained a military reputation, have been famous for some peculiarity of tactics, unknown until then, and by this novelty causing embarrassment to the enemy. Fortification was certainly the prevailing excellence in the Danish system of warfare: their entrenchments were so many walled towns, in which they were secure from surprise, and where, if fortunate in their marauding excursions, they stored their booty, or, if beaten in the field, they rallied their flying troops, and waited until reinforcements should arrive. The castle of Kinwith was probably an old British fort; for Asser, who had seen it, and says that it was fortified "after our fashion," came from Wales, and was consequently a Briton by birth. The castle was surrounded by a loose wall, which was its only mode of defence; but even this protected the fugitive people of Devonshire from the

* Claud. A. 5. p. 157 as quoted by Turner, p. 562.

Danish arrows, until they found themselves sufficiently strong to act again on the aggressive. This fact could not be lost on the enquiring mind of Alfred; for it is the prerogative of genius to gather materials from every quarter to construct its works of greatness, and the greatest military commanders of all ages have been those who have turned the peculiar modes and inventions of their enemies to the defeat of those enemies themselves. It is probable, that other patriotic aldermen and thanes throughout Wessex were roused like their king to action, by the success which fortune had granted to their arms in Devonshire, and began to make preparation for a new campaign. Odun also, the brave earl of Devon, was not likely to slumber on the victory which he had gained: the remnant of the Danes that had escaped fled to their ships, and we read of nothing to prevent the victorious English from marching eastward to join such troops as might be still in attendance on their king, or otherwise disposed to renew the war in Somerset and Wilts. To the arrival of this triumphant body, perhaps, may be attributed the fact, that an army of no small numbers seems to have appeared at the king's summons in a remarkably short space of time.

But this fact has received a very different solution from the pious writer of the Translation of St. Cuthbert, who has not lost the opportunity of administering a lecture on the Providence of God, and the duty of man's submitting to His will. The admonition is doubtlessly of use to mankind; but the occasion which calls it forth is no longer generally admitted to shew marks of any peculiar intervention of the Almighty, or deviation from the usual course of His Providence. The legend to which we allude is found in two

different forms: the first occurs in the History of Ingulf, and is confined to what may be looked on as a dream of Alfred, and possibly may be true: the second, more lengthy, in the tract on the Translation of St. Cuthbert, before mentioned^b, ascribes to the immediate agency and mercy of the Almighty, the assembling of Alfred's army, and the rapid success with which he regained his throne and kingdom. In the former, it is the mother of Alfred who is brought upon the stage, in the latter, his wife. There appears to be no reason for preferring the one view of the case more than the other, as both of these ladies may have been alive at this time, and would probably have joined the king as speedily as possible, if they knew where he was to be found. Ingulf's version of the legend is as follows.

“The fortress which Alfred constructed in Athelney, he afterwards converted into a monastery of monks, in memory of the time which he had spent there, and to the exaltation of the holy Church. One day, when the whole household had gone out to fish in the neighbouring marshes, and the king was sitting alone in this fortress, engaged in studying the holy Scriptures, or reading the exploits of illustrious men, as was his constant custom, and the annals of the fathers, he heard a poor man knock at the gate, and ask something to eat for the mercy of God. Calling his mother, who was then residing with him, he told her to go to the cellar, and give something to the poor Christian man for the love of Christ. She went to do as he bade her, but finding only one loaf there, she came and told the king that there was not enough for the household, who would soon return from fishing. The king, hearing

^b This legend is given also in Brompton, Simeon of Durham's History of the Church of Durham, and elsewhere.

this, (that there should be such poverty in a king's larder!) gave devout thanks to God, and commanded that half of the loaf should be given to the poor servant of Christ, adding these words, 'Blessed be God in His gifts! He is able, if He so will, to increase that half immensely, who, when He so willed it, was able to feed five thousand men on five loaves and two fishes.' He then dismissed the poor man, and afterwards, fatigued by the weight of his cares, or by his protracted reading, he went to rest, and saw the holy bishop Cuthbert approach to him, and deliver this message in the name of the Lord. 'Pious King Alfred, the Lord is moved to pity at the misery of the English, who have mourned long and deeply for their sins: He has, moreover, this day, in the form of a poor man, approved your patience, and gratefully received the morsel which you gave Him in the midst of your own great want. He promises you, through me, that, though you are now a wretched exile, you shall soon be victorious over your enemies, and triumphantly regain the throne of your kingdom. And this shall be a sign to you, that though your household, who are gone out to fish, may find great impediment to their success in the winter's ice, yet by the Divine mercy, they shall gain the object of their wishes, and about the third hour of the day, shall return with a wonderful quantity of fish.' Saying these words, the Saint disappeared, and the king awaking, told the vision to his mother, who replied that she also, whilst asleep in her chamber, had seen the same vision, and the same Saint, appearing to her in like manner, had addressed her in the same words. As they were speaking, the fishermen came in from the marshes with an abundance of fish, enough to feed a large army."

The form which this anecdote has received at the hands of the monk, who wrote for the honour of the Church of Durham, to which he probably belonged, and for the credit of his patron Saint Cuthbert^c, surpasses all that can be ascribed to natural causes only, or such as act on the "fancy according to the current of thoughts precedent." A literal translation of it is given in the note below^d.

* "In the Life of St. Neot, as I find by some Excerpta out of it in the third vol. of Mr. Leland's Collections, (f. 11, a.) 'tis said, that 'twas not St. Cuthbert, but St. Neot, who appeared to Alfred, which Mr. Leland has noted to be a mistake, and contrary to the authority of other writers." SPELMAN'S LIFE OF ALFRED, p. 59, note.

^d "When God, with His wonted mercy, had now decreed to put an end to the barbarous cruelties of the Danes, it came to pass that Alfred was sitting at home with his wife, and one servant only, for all the others had been sent out to fish. Meanwhile a person in a foreign habit approached him, and earnestly besought alms. Alfred forthwith, with ready looks, ordered food to be given him; and learning from the servant that no food remained for their daily consumption, except one loaf and a measure of wine, said to him, with joyful countenance, 'Thanks be to God, who hath thought worthy to visit me, His poor servant, in the person of another of His servants, who is as poor as I.' As he said these words with a cheerful look, he ordered half of each to be given to the man, thereby fulfilling the Apostolical precept, 'God loveth a cheerful giver.' The stranger, apparently a poor man, took it, and said, 'Do not delay to offer repeated thanks to your lord, for his compassion towards me; for I hope that this his benevolence will be abundantly compensated by heavenly mercies.' He said this to the servant, who told it to his master; but, when the servant returned to the place, he no where could see the stranger, but he found the bread and wine whole, and bearing no marks of having been divided. Astonished at this occurrence, he hastened to inform his master of it. The king recognised the miracle, and both himself and his wife were no less lost in astonishment, than their servant; and, although they minutely examined, they could not find out which way he had come, or which way he had gone; and this was the more remarkable, because the place, being surrounded by water, could not be approached without a boat.

“ Meanwhile, the ninth hour of the day [3 o'clock] was approaching, and those, who had gone out to fish, brought home three boat-fuls, and said, that they had never caught such an abundance during the three years which they had passed in those marshes. Delighted at this instance of God's mercy, they spent the day in greater glee than usual, and at the approach of night, went each to rest after the labours of the day. All the others were soon buried in sleep, but Alfred alone lay awake in his bed, thinking with a sad heart on his sufferings and his exile, and wondering much about the stranger and the unexpected draught of fishes. On a sudden a light from heaven, brighter than the beams of the sun, shone upon his bed. Struck with awe, he forgot all his former anxieties, and looked in amazement on the brightness of the light. In the midst of which appeared an elderly man, bearing the pontifical fillet on his black locks, but having a most benignant look, and bearing on his right hand a copy of the holy Gospels, adorned most marvellously with gold and jewels. He advanced, and calmed the fears of the astonished king with these words: ‘ Let not the brilliancy of my coming disturb you, beloved King Alfred, nor the fear of barbarian cruelty any longer harass you: for God, who does not despise the groans of His poor servants, will soon put an end to your troubles, and I, from henceforth, will be your constant helper.’ The king was comforted with these words, and asked him earnestly who he was, and why he had come. Then the elderly man, smiling, said, ‘ I am he, to whom you this day ordered bread to be given: but I took not so much pleasure in the bread and wine, as in the devotion of your soul. But, whereas you ask me my name, know that I am Cuthbert, the servant of God, and am sent to explain to you, in familiar terms, how you may be relieved from the persecution which has so long afflicted you. In particular, therefore, I advise you to cherish mercy and justice, and to teach them to your sons above every thing else, seeing that at your prayer God has vouchsafed to grant to you the disposal of the whole of Britain. If you are faithful to God and me, you shall find me, from this time, your invincible buckler, whereon all the strength of your enemies shall be broken. Wherefore now put off all your fears and inactivity, and, as soon as to-morrow's light shall dawn, cross over to the nearest shore, and blow loudly with your horn three times. And as wax melts before the heat of the fire, so by your blasts shall the pride of your enemies, with God's will, be dissolved, and the courage of your friends be aroused. About the ninth hour of the day, five hundred of your dearest friends shall come to you fully armed;

and by this sign shall you believe me, that, at the end of seven days, an army shall assemble together from the whole of this land to Mount Assandune, prepared to follow you as their king, in adversity as well as in prosperity : there shall you join battle with the enemy, and, without a doubt, gain the victory.' Having said these words, the saint disappeared from the king's eyes, and the light faded away. Alfred, feeling certain that all he had heard would come to pass, yielded himself wholly to the saint's protection and guidance. At the dawn of day, he hastened with unusual activity to the shore, and did as he had been directed. His horn was heard both by his enemies and friends, and five hundred of his best adherents joined him, well prepared with arms. He revealed to them the vision, and said, ' We have now seen what punishment our fathers, who are dead, have, by God's just ordinance, been suffered to receive from the barbarians, for our crimes as well as theirs. We ourselves also are sought out, day and night, for similar treatment ; nor have we any place of refuge to which we can trust. I beg you, therefore, let us obey the admonitions of our patron, St. Cuthbert. Let us be faithful to God, eschew evil, love the practice of virtue, and so shall we every where experience the benefit of his protection.' In short, an army from the whole country came with Alfred on the appointed day to the mountain aforesaid ; and on the other side there came that ill-omened host of fierce barbarians, trusting to their superior numbers, and to their success in former battles. They instantly engaged, but the event of the contest was not the same to both. On the one side the Christians proved, by their slaughter of the enemy, how wholesome a thing it is to trust in heavenly aid : on the other hand, the Pagans experienced, by their defeat, how detestable it is to presume on human pride. Thus this battle was gained without much loss to his army ; and Alfred received dominion over the whole of Britain : and, as at his court he always retained in his thoughts the precepts of the saint which he had learnt in adversity, he at all times, and in all places, prevailed over the machinations of his adversaries."

CHAP. XVII.

ALFRED PREPARES TO LEAVE ATHELNEY—AS A GLEE-MAN HE RECONNOITRES THE DANISH CAMP—SUMMONS HIS ARMY AT EGBERT'S STONE—MARCHES TO ETHANDUNE—DEFEATS THE DANES—TAKES THEIR CAMP—GUTHRUM BECOMES A CHRISTIAN.

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY tells us, that King Alfred used often in later days to speak of the time which he spent in the wilds of Somersetshire, of the hardships which he daily suffered, and of the dangers which continually encompassed him. It was now about five months since his troops had been defeated by the enemy, and himself obliged to become a fugitive and an outcast. Yet I believe that the plan which King Alfred adopted was what afterwards mainly conduced to bring about his restoration, and the reestablishment of his country's freedom. Many indications of this appear in the narratives of the old chroniclers. It is probable that the Danes owed their success at Chippenham in a great measure to the suddenness of their attack, and the king now seems to have retaliated upon them by a similar mode of operations. That he kept up a communication with his faithful nobles throughout the three neighbouring counties, is evident; for by a hasty summons of a few days, a large army was speedily brought together. Before, however, his standard was again spread to the breezes, it was Alfred's policy to obtain all the information in his power concerning his enemies, to reconnoitre their position, their defences,

and to examine where they were the most exposed to attack from negligence, or the consciousness of security. The story which is told of Alfred has been credited by some, and rejected as fabulous by others. It certainly is not found in Asser's Biography, nor in the other five early chronicles; but it is told by Ingulf, who lived at the time of the Norman Conquest, and may have had access to other records which since have perished. It is also found in the History of the Kings of England by Malmesbury, who was not prone to listen to fables, unless they were such as rested on the authority of the Church. Neither does the anecdote seem to be at all improbable, when we consider the nature of the times, and the great simplicity of kings, who mixed with their subjects without that affectation of pomp and dignity, which at present are used as a substitute for departed power. It was the king's intention to assemble his troops and to surprise the enemy unprepared, as they had before surprised him at Chippenham. To strike a sure blow, it was necessary that he should be able to depend upon the accuracy of his information. If he failed at this crisis of his fate, a second chance would probably never present itself: he could not trust the eyes or ears of an ordinary spy, and he determined to go himself and inspect the motions of the enemy. Now it was that he derived a practical benefit from the subjects of his early education. The Saxon poems and ballads, which he had drunk in with an attentive ear in his youth, were still fresh in his mind, and the harp, which almost every person of decent condition in those days could touch, was not silent in the king's hands. The profession of a minstrel was held in general estimation among the northern nations. Singing the deeds of

war, they were themselves exempt from its terrors: the sword and spear were lowered to greet the glee-man who chanced to enter the tent of the warrior, and many a time did the savage chieftain, melting at the plaintive melody of song, verify the words of the poet who sings, that

Music hath charms to sooth the savage breast!

To effect his purpose, Alfred adopted the costume of a Saxon minstrel, and set out for the Danish camp, which was still in the neighbourhood of Chippenham; for so total seems to have been the defeat of the English, that the enemy imagined they were annihilated, and gave themselves up to security and enjoyment. The king was admitted without difficulty to their camp, and had an opportunity of seeing every thing which was passing within. He perhaps may have been brought into the presence of Guthrum himself, and witnessed the ease and confidence which reigned in that chieftain's tent. When he had satisfied himself on all the points which he wished to know, he returned to Athelney, a distance of thirty or forty miles^a.

Whitsuntide was now at hand; and the king prepared to leave the fortress at Athelney. Asser gives us the following account of the promptness of his movements. "In the seventh week after Easter, he rode to Egbert's Stone in the eastern part of Selwood^b, or the Great Wood, called in the old British language Coit-mawr. Here he was met by all the neighbouring

^a Ingulf; Will. Malmesb. *Henrici de Silgrave Chronicon*, ed. C. Hook, 8vo. London 1848, pag. 45.

^b "Seal, in Saxon, is a willow tree. This was, therefore, a wood of willows; and so the MS. Claud. names it, *silvan salicis*." TURNER, i. p. 566.

folk of Somersetshire, Wiltshire, and Hampshire, who had not for fear of the Pagans fled beyond the sea^c; and, when they saw the king alive after such great tribulation, they received him, as he deserved, with joy and acclamations, and all encamped there for the night. The next morning, the king struck his tents, and went to Æcglea, where they again encamped, and passed the night." At this place, the Annals of Asser, a tract which we have already noticed, relate that his relative St. Neot appeared to him in a dream, and comforted him with the assurance, that the next day would end all his calamities^d. "The next morning he marched to Ethandune, and there fought a fierce and well-contested battle against all the army of the

^c The following passage, translated from Wallingford's account of Alfred's campaign in 878, [p. 537.] is worthy of notice: "The army which had fled out of the country, hearing that King Alfred had renewed the war against the enemy, recrossed the sea in haste, and joined his camp, by which means he became daily more and more powerful and threatening to the enemy. Alfred, also, sent ambassadors, and invited to his assistance Rollo, who had been occupied in continual wars against the Gauls, except the interruption which himself had caused to them. Rollo, remembering the benefit which he had received, as we have before mentioned, when he formerly touched on the English coast, consented to his demands, and breaking up the siege of Paris, crossed to England." As Turner justly observes, it is not probable that Alfred asked help of Rollo, and yet it is difficult to account for its invention, if false.

^d The mediation of this obscure Saint seems to have been as necessary an episode to the career of Alfred, as the Goddess Egeria was to King Numa Pompilius. He not only promised Alfred the victory in the dream, but was seen the next day in the battle as a standard-bearer, leading on one of the divisions of the army, and was pointed out by Alfred to the soldiers, who were marvellously encouraged by the sight. The same MS. which records this miracle, [Claud. A. 5. p. 159.] relates also, that Alfred addressed his soldiers before the battle, and gave them the assurance of a glorious victory.

Pagans, whom, with the Divine help, he defeated with great slaughter, and pursued them flying to their fortification. Immediately he slew all the men and carried off all the booty he could find outside the fortress, which he afterwards laid siege to with all his army. When fourteen days were expired, the Pagans, compelled by famine, cold, fear, and lastly by despair, asked for peace, on condition that they should give the king as many hostages as he pleased, but should receive none from him in return, in which form they had never before made a treaty with any one. The king shewed them mercy, and received such hostages as he chose, after which the Pagans swore also, that they would immediately leave the kingdom; and their king, Guthrum, promised to embrace Christianity, and receive baptism at King Alfred's hands. All of which articles he and his men fulfilled as they had promised. For, seven weeks afterwards, King Guthrum himself, with thirty chosen men of his army, came to Alfred at a place called Aller, near Athelney, and there King Alfred, receiving him as his son by adoption, raised him from the holy laver of Baptism on the eighth day, at the royal villa of Wedmore, where the holy ointment was poured upon him*. After his baptism, he remained

* " In the Saxon Annals 'tis said they were baptized at Alre, and that *his crism-lising was æt Wedmor*, his chrism (or rather chrismal) was pulled off at Wedmor. This was a white linen cloth put upon their heads presently after they had been baptized and anointed, that the oil might stay on, and taken off 8 days after. In MS. Digby, n. 196, the place is called Westm., i. e. Westmer or Westminster, which one might conclude to be a mistake of the librarian for Wedm, i. e. Wedmer or Wedmor, if immediately after the author himself did not tell us that Guthrum and his company were entertained these 12 days at London." SPELMAN'S LIFE OF ALFRED, p. 66, note.

twelve days with the king, who, with all his nobles, gave him many fine houses."

So brief a narrative of the victory at Ethandune, which replaced Alfred more firmly than before on the throne of his kingdom, has naturally given much subject for enquiry to the critics and commentators, who have endeavoured to trace the movements of the king's army in this rapid and glorious campaign. There is nothing better established in history than the identity of Ethelingeye, where Alfred's fortress in the marshes was constructed, with the modern Athelney. Capricious fortune has mercifully spared the antiquary the greater mortification which a doubt on this point would have produced. A beautiful jewel was found many years ago on the spot; an exact representation of which forms the frontispiece to our work, and the original is still preserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford^f. Did the king drop

^f See the Appendix, for an account of this jewel. I subjoin the following observations concerning the locality of Athelney.

"Dr. Whitaker, in June 1806, thought that the marshes on the new road to Taunton, were those in which Alfred took his refuge. This is the tradition of the country, where the ALFRED'S HEAD has been taken for the sign of the inn: and an inscription has been set up about a mile to the west to commemorate the belief. The farmhouse in this neighbourhood was then called Athelney, and at Burrowbridge there was at that time a pass over the Perrot, which had a rounded hillock near it, at which a line of raised road from the east terminated. Mr. Collinson describes it as a very high and steep mount, on the east side of the river Perrot, which had on it part of the tower and walls of an ancient chapel. The river was navigable to this hamlet, and further on to Langport, and had over it a stone bridge of three high arches. Dr. Whitaker thinks, that on this mount Alfred built his fortification. LIFE OF ST. NEOT, p. 245—8." TURNER, p. 561. In 1832 I visited Athelney, and noticed the pillar which has of late years been erected on the mount above mentioned.

this gem in the hurry of his frequent sallies on the enemy, and equally hasty retreats to his fortress? Or, was it deposited in the Monastery, which Alfred afterwards constructed there, as a precious personal relic of the great king, and of the heroic stand which he there made to defend the rights of his throne and the liberties of his people? These are questions which we cannot answer; for the speechless relic tells us no more than that it is as old as the time of Alfred, which is evident from the style of workmanship, and the Saxon writing, ALFRED HAD ME WORKED⁶, with which it is inscribed.

Leaving Athelney, and following the route of the king, we have no difficulty in identifying the place called Egbert's or Egbricht's stone, on the east of Selwood, where Alfred was met by the troops of his subjects who flocked to him, with Brixton Deverill, a

I have since, by the kindness of General Sir John Slade, of Monty House, near Taunton, and proprietor of Athelney, received a copy of the inscription which is placed on the side of the pillar.

"King Alfred the Great, in the year of our Lord 879, having been defeated by the Danes, fled for refuge to the forest of Athelney, where he lay concealed from his enemies, for the space of a whole year. He soon after regained possession of his throne, and in grateful remembrance of the protection he had received under the favour of Heaven, erected a Monastery on this spot, and endowed it with all the lands contained in the isle of Athelney. To perpetuate the memorial of so remarkable an incident in the life of that illustrious prince, this edifice was founded by John Slade, Esq. of Maunsel House, the proprietor of Athelney Farm, and Lord of the Manor of North Petherton. A. D. 1801." The date should be 878, not 879; and five months instead of *a whole year*.

A farm-house stands at the foot of the mount, and I observed, in the yard adjoining, a small heavy iron gate, apparently very ancient, and perhaps belonging to the monastery which once stood on the spot.

⁶ Ælfred mec heit gewyrca.

small village about half way between Hindon and Warminster, and about thirty miles from Athelney. From thence the army marched the next day to *Æglea*^h, about the locality of which place writers are not agreed. Whilst someⁱ have referred it to Higley, near Whaddon; and others to Clay Hill, an eminence rising boldly to the height of several hundred feet between Frome and Warminster, and having marks of a small encampment on its summit; a third opinion has connected it with Leigh or Ley, near Westbury, where tradition^k says, that there was once a palace of the Anglo-Saxon kings. In support of this view, Bishop Gibson admits that the name, as it appears in the chronicles, may easily have arisen from the corruption of the prefix *Æt* or *at*, which is often found placed before Anglo-Saxon names of places, and thus *Æt* Lea would easily be converted into *Æcglea*. A similar difference of opinion prevails, as to the place of the battle in which the Danes were defeated. It is variously written Ethandune, Edderandun, Assandune, and Edendune. Dr. Whitaker thinks it is the present Yatton, about five miles from Chippenham, "but," says he, "the battle itself, was a little lower on the Avon at Slaughterford," where, according to Gibson, there still prevails a tradition, that a great number of Danes were slain near that spot. But there is another village, in the neighbourhood of Westbury, which seems to have superior claims to be considered as the Ethandune of the ninth century. This is Eddington,

^h The Saxon Chron. calls this place *Iglea*; Asser *Æcglea*; Florence *Eglea*; and Huntingdon *Eglea*: it is not mentioned by Simeon or Ethelwerd.

ⁱ This is Dr. Whitaker's opinion. [St. Neot, p. 266.]

^k Gough's Camden, i. p. 146.

or Edindon, about six miles from Leigh, and not more than ten from Clay Hill, where consequently the Danes might have been more easily surprised by the king than at Yatton, which is ten miles further towards the north. Eddington has also a stronger argument in its favour, in its proximity to Bratton Castle, "the fortification to which the Danes fled, and held out a siege of fourteen days. It is situated on the point of a high hill, commanding all the country, and is double-ditched on the south and north sides, with very deep trenches. It has two entrances, from the south-east to the plain, and from the north-east to Edindon, both guarded by a redoubt¹: on the west side is a spring. It is oval, 350 paces long, by near 200 broad, and its area 23 or 24 acres. Near the middle is a large oblong barrow, 60 paces long, under which have been found many human skulls and bones mixed with stags' horns, fragments of urns, and pieces of iron weapons, and mill-stones like the modern Scotch quernes, sixteen and eighteen inches diameter. . . . Under the south side, within the trenches, is a circular mound of earth, made in the last century, called the TABLE, with a kind of horseshoe in the centre. The soil of this hill is chalk, abounding with petrifications, belemnites, spines of echini, &c. On the south-west face of the hill is a most curious monument unnoticed by Bishop Gibson: a white horse in a walking attitude, cut out of the chalk, fifty-four feet high from his toe to his chest, and to the

¹ Yet Dr. Whitaker [p. 269.] "supposes the fortress to which the Danes fled to have been the double entrenchment in Bury-wood, which is thus described by Gough. 'On Colerne-down, on the fosse near Wraxhall and Slaughterford, in Bury-wood, is North-wood, a camp of eighteen acres, double works, not Roman: the entrance from Colerne-down.' p. 99." TURNER, i. p. 569.

tip of his ear near one hundred feet high, and from ear to tail one hundred feet long: an undoubted memorial of this important victory, and similar to that by which Alfred commemorated his first great victory in Berkshire eight years before^m."

The whole country for many miles round those villages abounds with ancient camps, barrows, and other relics of the wars, which a thousand years ago were waged with such persevering fury between the Saxons and the Danes: and it is to be lamented, that our historical records are too brief and indistinct, to enable us to distinguish very accurately between the monuments of the different nations, who have combated on these fields of battle. Time has passed his effacing hand over these memorials, brushing away all the minute parts which might have indicated a national style or the peculiarities of an individual people, and has left only gigantic mounds and masses of earth, which prove that our forefathers put forth the powers with which God has endowed mankind in the construction of works, excelling in magnitude, and perhaps equalling in skill, all that the present age, of intellect and science, has been able to produce.

^m The battle of Ashdown, see page 100. A large white horse, cut out on the plains of Wiltshire, and visible for miles, is supposed to be a memorial of this battle.

It may be added, that on the property of the late Sir Richard Colt Hoare, Baronet, at Stourton, is a three-sided tower, called Alfred's tower, erected in modern times, to mark the spot where the king is said to have first set up his standard, after his departure from Athelney.

CHAP. XVIII.

ALFRED'S PLAN FOR CONVERTING THE DANES INTO USEFUL SUBJECTS—
THEY SETTLE IN EAST ANGLIA—THE TREATY BETWEEN ALFRED
AND GUTHRUM—A NEW BODY OF DANES UNDER HASTING LAND AT
FULHAM, BUT ARE COMPELLED TO LEAVE THE KINGDOM—THEIR
ADVENTURES AND RAVAGES ON THE CONTINENT BETWEEN 880 AND
893.

WHEN we take a just and comprehensive view of human nature, and of the circumstances with which man is surrounded, we detect so many cases in which misfortune borders upon crime, and crime upon misfortune, that it is often impossible to punish the transgressor, without adding an undeserving weight of affliction to him who already is sufficiently unhappy. This observation applies to whole nations even more than to individuals; for a national calamity falls upon all alike in some sort, though probably in different degrees; and whenever an entire nation or a large body of men are driven by the all-powerful force of necessity^a, the evils which they commit are to be judged by a different standard from that which we apply to crimes, prompted by no necessities, but springing from an inherent and spontaneous love of evil. When we read in the Saxon Chronicle, that, notwithstanding the total subjugation to which Guthrum and his Danes were reduced, they did not leave Alfred's dominion for a whole year after their submission, and find no notice taken of any

^a The *fate* of the Ancients.

attempt on the king's part to compel them to perform their agreement, the reflection may occur, that the bodies of Danes who so long ravaged the northern coasts of Europe, were not all of them led by a pure and simple love of war and plunder, but in some cases, perhaps, were driven by necessity, not choice, to procure subsistence, clothing, and houses to cover them from the cold, in other lands, less populous than their own, or more abundant in producing the necessaries of life. It is probable that England in the ninth century was far less thickly peopled than the countries which border on the German ocean, out of which the hosts of Danish pirates had issued. It is also likely that many of the Danish armies, when defeated by King Alfred, were in consequence beholden to him for their daily food, and having no home to return to, must have perished, if he had not taken compassion upon their destitute condition. Men do not wish to pass all their lives in roving about the world, and gathering booty, wherever booty is to be found. It is natural to them to look forwards to retirement and ease from the bustle and turmoil in which their lives have been spent. When, therefore, the King proposed to embody the vanquished Danes among his own subjects, and to assign them lands for their maintenance, his policy was obviously two-fold; first, to people more densely the country over which he reigned, and to strengthen his power by the accession of a brave body of men to defend it; secondly, to free himself from the embarrassment which the Danes left to themselves might have given him, and mercifully to relieve them also from the terrible sufferings, which in their forlorn condition would have again provoked them to ravage, and have probably carried them on to their own destruction.

The army of Guthrum^b left Chippenham in 879, and marched to Cirencester, where they remained twelve months, after which they removed into East Anglia, and, dividing the country among them, began to occupy and cultivate their new possessions^c. This triumphant and peaceful termination of a war, which had begun under such disastrous circumstances, has always been considered as the culminating point of Alfred's policy, and has attached to him that character for wisdom, by which he has ever since been distinguished. But the accommodation with Guthrum was not complete until it could be placed upon a broader basis than those temporary arrangements which had formerly been effected between the king and the Danes, to suit a momentary emergency, and which had been broken without compunction. It was now the intention of the king to blend the two nations into one, and to ratify their union by a legislative treaty, on the one hand, brief and intelligible to all parties, and on the other hand, more liberal and comprehensive than had ever been before witnessed between nations that had struggled one against the other in bitter and unrelenting hostility. The treaty between Alfred and Guthrum has come down to us entire. Two copies of it exist in the original Anglo-Saxon language, but with so little variation of phraseology, that it is unnecessary to make a distinction between the two^d.

^b Turner remarks, [vol. i. p. 574.] "It is said in the Saxon life of Neot, that after the pacification, Godrun, with the remains of his army, departed in peace to his own country, 'to his agenem earde mid ealre sibbe.' MS. Vesp. D. 14. This seems to imply a return to Denmark, as East Anglia was not properly his own country." I should rather infer the loose and inaccurate character of the "Life," for few of these biographies have any direct historical value.

^c Saxon Ch. Ass. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

^d The original of the treaty may be seen in the Appendix, No. IV.

The whole of this curious treaty is contained in five paragraphs, as follows :

“ ALFRED AND GUTHRUM’S PEACE:

“ This is the peace that King Alfred and King Guthrum, and the witan^e of all the English nation, and all the people that are in East-Anglia, have all ordained and with oaths confirmed, for themselves and for their descendants, as well for born as for unborn, who reckon of God’s mercy or of ours.

“ First, concerning our land-boundaries : up on the Thames, and then up on the Lea, and along the Lea unto its source, then right to Bedford, then up on the Ouse unto Watling-Street.

“ Then is this : if a man be slain, we estimate all equally dear^f, English and Danish, at eight half-marks of pure gold ; except the churl^g who resides on gavel-land and their liesings^h, they also are equally dear, at two hundred shillings. And, if a king’s thane be accused of man-slaying, if he dare to clear himself, let him do that with twelve king’s thanes. If any one accuse that man, who is of less degree than the king’s thane, let him clear himself with eleven of his equals and with one king’s thane. And so in every suit which may be for more than four mancusesⁱ. And, if

^e Wise men—equivalent to our modern Parliament.

^f This may appear singular to the modern reader, unless he is aware that the punishment of death was not inflicted in such cases : a sum of money called the were-gild was adjudged, according to the rank of the deceased.

^g Rustic, or farmer : certain lands in Kent are still subject to the law of gavel-kind.

^h In Iceland they still call a freedman a leysingi.

ⁱ For an account of the mancus, see page 12 of the Appendix, note ^m.

he dare not, let him pay for it three-fold, as it may be valued.

“ Of warranters.

“ And that every man know his warrantor for men, and for horses, and for oxen.

“ And we all ordained on that day that the oaths were sworn, that neither bond nor free might go to the host^k without leave, no more than any of them to us. But, if it happen, that from necessity any of them will have traffic with us, or we with them, with cattle and with goods, that is to be allowed in this wise; that hostages be given in pledge of peace, and as evidence whereby it may be known that the party has a clear back.”

^k i. e. the army of the Danes. Lappenberg understands this restriction in a very different sense, hardly (I think) to be justified by the language. “ The provisions,” says he, of the treaty “ are remarkable, which, by their contingent prohibition, shew that Englishmen, both free and servile, were in the habit of passing over to the Danish army; though of Christian fugitives, who even sought aid from the Northmen against their own countrymen, many examples occur, and we meet with a very remarkable one at this time. Isembard, seigneur of La Ferté in Ponthieu, having had a quarrel with his mother's brother King Louis, the son of Louis the Stammerer, had renounced his faith, and fled to Guthrum before he had become a convert to Christianity, and had been received with welcome. He accompanied him on his expeditions in England, and conducted him,—to whom the treaty with Ælfred had afforded leisure, but no quiet,—back with him to his country, where, after many devastations, and the burning of the rich abbey of St. Riquier on the Somme, they were driven back at Saucourt in the district of Vimeu by King Louis the Third.” [vol. ii. p. 57.] “ See Alberici Chron. a. 881. Guthrum is here called Guormund, as in the passage there previously extracted from Malmesbury. The Chron. S. Richarii, ap. Bouquet, t. viii. p. 273. calls him Guaramund, and makes him fall at Saucourt.” *IBID.* note ².

By this agreement, the offspring of a liberal policy, the foundation was laid for future concord between two nations, that had so lately been hostile; the boundaries of the kingdom¹, which were assigned to Guthrum and his Danes, were clearly marked out, and the rights of both people were defined to be the same; whilst the restriction on free intercourse between the two was a wise precaution against private quarrels, robberies, and even murder, which otherwise might have ensued.

The wisdom of the course which Alfred now adopted for the pacification of the Danes, and the tranquillity of England, was speedily apparent. A fresh fleet of northern pirates, in 879, entered the mouth of the Thames, and encamped at Fulham. Some of the chroniclers tells us that they joined the army that was

¹ According to Spelman, [p. 66.] Northumberland also was assigned to Guthrum; but evidently without much ancient authority to support him in this opinion. All the six early chronicles mention East Anglia only as occupied by Guthrum, and the treaty between the two kings can hardly be explained in any other sense: the frontiers which were to divide his kingdom from the rest of the island are clearly marked out; the Thames, the Lea as far as Hertford, the Watling-street to Bedford, and the Ouse as far as the sea. "Which is sufficient proof," says Hearne in a note to Spelman, [p. 67.] "that the eastern parts of England then belonged to the Danes; notwithstanding which, Polydore Virgil, calling this king by the name of Gormon, vehemently contends, that that country was not bestowed upon him, as is noted by Mr. Leland in the second volume of his MS. collections in the Bodleian Library, f. 192. a. Krantzius likewise denies that this Gormon was converted to the Christian Faith; yet grants [*de regibus Daniæ*, lib. iv. c. 15.] that about this time one Froto was converted. But, whatever these authors say, the agreement itself plainly distinguisheth their territories; and the testimony of Asser, who lived at this time, (not to mention the Saxon Annals, and the passage of John Picus, who lived in the reign of Hen. I. cited by Mr. Lambard,) is uncontrollable as to Guthrum's baptism."

already in the country, but this is certainly to be understood no farther than to the effect that a communication passed between the two. The plans of Guthrum and those with him at Cirencester, were, however, now peaceful, and did not suit the disposition of the new comers. It is also not improbable that, if they had persisted in their design of plundering, they would have found the army of Guthrum drawn out in array against them: for men do not scruple to change sides in such cases, when they clearly see their own interest in defending that which they before had attacked: and Guthrum was not likely to overlook the dangers which must accrue to his new kingdom of East Anglia, if any more bodies of his own piratical countrymen were allowed to enter the island, and to ravage for themselves. Thus, the new army of Danes, finding no one willing to back them in their desires, and that their course was not so smooth as they had anticipated, and perhaps also in danger from the provisions which Alfred would naturally have made for the defence of his coasts, again put to sea in 880, and crossed to Flanders, where they fortified themselves in the city of Ghent, and put in practice the barbarities and outrages which they had intended to perpetrate in England.

The leader of the freebooters who crossed the sea in 880 is thought to have been the famous Hasting^m,

^m "The chronology of the earlier deeds of Hasting rests chiefly on the *Chronicon Turonense*, ap. Du Chesne, *Scriptt. rer. Norman.* (a work rarely named by modern writers,) according to which he came as early as 841 (not 851, according to Guil. Gemmet.) with Biorn to France. The years 856 and 858 in the said work, are to be compared with Prudent. *Trecens. an.* 857 and 858, where the treaty, which, according to Prudent., Hasting concluded with Charles the Bald, is here related of Biorn. The expedition to Luna in

who afterwards made himself so formidable to the northern countries of Europe, by the terrible calamities which he inflicted upon the inhabitants of their maritime districts. The terrific interest which not only the continental nations but the English themselves felt in the proceedings of Hasting's army, is evinced by the comparative minuteness with which our national chroniclers have traced his ravages and battles, though, by the wise precautions and successful administration of Alfred, they suffered but little from his attacks. We may be content to cast a cursory glance over the career of that plundering army, during the thirteen years^a which intervened before they again assailed the coasts of England, as it is briefly related in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

"A.D. 881. This year the army went further into

Chron. Turon. becomes much more probable through Prudent., an. 859, who says, that the Danes already occupied the isle of La Camargue and the mouth of the Rhone, whence the transit to the gulf of Spezzia was very easy. The passage in Hincmar Rhemens. a. 866 (whence Chron. Norm. a. 869), where 'pagus Italiæ' is excellently corrected by Pertz to 'pagus Isaliæ (Yssel),' may not be referred to Hasting. Cf. also Rhegino, aa. 867, 874. Gesta Domin. Ambazian. a. 877, ap. Du Chesne, p. 24, with the course of our narrative. After this comparison it will be scarcely necessary to mention, that I acknowledge but one historic Hasting, believing this view to be better founded than Suhm's confused mass of citations and the indefinite accounts of others would lead to suppose." LAP-PENBERG, vol. ii. pp. 55-56.

An abstract of Hasting's career may be seen in Turner, [History of the Anglo-Saxons, vol. i. p. 577, &c.] who observes, that "Dudo has attempted to draw his character; but he has only recollected and applied to him thirty-two vituperative epithets from the Latin language, strung into hexameters. One of the historian's bright ideas is, that Hastings should be

"Non atramento verum carbone notandus. p. 63."

^a From 880 to 893.

France, and the French fought against them: and then was the army there horsed after the battle.

“A.D. 882. This year the army went up along the banks of the Maese far into France, and there sate one year.

“A.D. 883. The army went up the Scheldt to Condé, and sate there one year.

“A.D. 884. The army went up the Somme to Amiens, and there sate one year.

“A.D. 885. This year the army divided itself into two parts: and one of them went eastward°.

“That same year, before mid-winter, Carl^p king of the French died; he was killed by a wild boar; and one year before this, his brother died: he too had the western kingdom: and they were both sons of Louis, who likewise had the western kingdom, and died that year when the sun was eclipsed^q: he was son of Charles, whose daughter [*Judith*] Ethelwolf, king of the West-Saxons, had for his queen. And that same year a large fleet drew together against the Old-Saxons; and there was a great battle twice in that year, and the Saxons had the victory, and the Frisians were there with them. That same year Charles succeeded to the western kingdom, and to all the kingdom on this side of the Wendel-sea^r and beyond this sea, in like manner as his great-grandfather had it, with the exception of the Lidwiccas^s. Charles was the son of Louis, who was brother to Charles, father of Judith, whom King Ethelwolf had for his wife; and they were sons of Louis, who was son of the elder Charles, whose father was Pippin. . . .

° Asser more correctly places the events which follow in 884.

^p Carloman.

^q A.D. 879.

^r The Tuscan sea.

^s The Bretons.

“ A. D. 886. This year the army, which before had marched eastward, turned back to the west, and thence up the Seine, where they took up their winter-quarters near the town of Paris.

“ A. D. 887. This year the army went up through the bridge at Paris, and thence up along the Seine as far as the Marne, and thence up the Marne to Chezy, and then sate down, there, and on the Yonne, two winters in the two places. And that same year Charles¹ king of the French died; and six weeks before he died, Arnulf his brother deprived him of his kingdom. And then was that kingdom divided into five, and five kings were consecrated thereto. This, however, was done by permission of Arnulf: and they said that they would hold it from his hand, because none of them on the father's side was born thereto except him alone. Arnulf then dwelt in the land east of the Rhine: and Rothulf then succeeded to the middle kingdom², and Oda to the western part, and Beongar and Witha³ to the land of the Lombards, and to the lands on that side of the mountain: and that they held in great discord, and fought two general battles, and oft and many times laid waste the land, and each repeatedly drove out the other. . . .

“ A. D. 890. This year the army went from the Seine to St. Lo, which is between Brittany and France; and the Bretons fought against them, and had the victory, and drove them out into a river, and drowned many of them.

“ A. D. 891. This year the army went eastward; and King Arnulf, with the East Franks, Saxons, and Bavarians, fought against that part which was mounted before the ships came up, and put them to flight.”

In 892 nothing is recorded of the proceedings of

¹ Charles le Gros.

² Burgundy.

³ Guido, or Guy.

Hasting's army, and in 893 we shall again follow them to England, where this redoubtable chieftain once more landed to measure his fortune or his skill with that of Alfred, but failed more signally than his predecessors to make an impression on his enemy, who was not only the greatest monarch, but also the greatest warrior, of the age.

CHAP. XIX.

PRECAUTIONS OF ALFRED AGAINST FUTURE INVASIONS OF THE DANES—
SECOND TREATY WITH GUTHRUM—SKIRMISHES WITH THE DANES
STILL CONTINUE—ALFRED TAKES FOUR DANISH SHIPS—DANES
BESIEGE ROCHESTER, WHICH IS RELIEVED BY THE KING—THE KING
ATTACKS THE EAST-ANGLIAN DANES BY SEA—DEFEATS THEIR
FLEET—HIS OWN FLEET IS DEFEATED ON THE COAST OF ESSEX.

THE conversion of Guthrum to Christianity could have been but nominal at the best: the defeat at Eddington, and the fortnight's siege which he endured within the lines of Bratton castle, were no doubt able instruments in compelling him to own allegiance to an earthly superior, who could claim no more than the homage of the lip; but they are altogether inefficient to produce that obedience of the heart, which is alone admitted in the service of the King of Heaven. Yet the thought of uniting the vanquished foe with his own people, not only under the same code of human laws, but as members of the same Church and professors of the same Faith, emanated from no other source than the capacious mind of Alfred.

We have already noticed the first outline of a treaty between the two kings. There exists, however, a second document, of similar character but of greater extent than the former, of which it is a sort of confirmation. Its object is principally to give laws to the Danes, who, being new converts, could not be very

well informed concerning the observances, principally religious, or at least intimately connected with religion, which formed the greater part of the code in a country where Christianity was established. But, for manifest reasons, these new statutes were addressed to Saxons as well as Danes, and for the most part the penalty for the breach of them was higher. It is therein enacted, that, forsaking Heathenism, they should worship One God and Him alone: that the peace of the Church should be inviolate, and the peace of the king unbroken: that if any one should renounce Christianity or promote heathenism, he should be punished, according to his offence, with a fine or the confiscation of his property. Then follow ordinances against misdemeanours in religious men, against incest, against the withholding of tithes, against buying, selling, or working on Sundays, against the neglect or desecration of the fasts which the Church enjoined, against trials of men on holidays and solemn fasts, against executing men on Sundays, against witches, against those who forswear themselves, or are guilty of many other similar crimes.

These ordinances bear the names not only of Alfred and Guthrum, but of Alfred's son, who reigned after him, under the name of Edward the Elder. This circumstance has caused some embarrassment to critics and historians; for, as Alfred was married in 868^a, his eldest son Edward could have been scarcely ten years old in 878, when Alfred defeated the Danes at Ethandune. Guthrum also died in 890, which was ten years before Edward the Elder succeeded to the throne, on the death of his father Alfred. To explain this discrepancy it has been supposed, that the laws which form the second treaty between Alfred and Guthrum, were

^a See page 98.

enacted a few years later, when Prince Edward was growing into a young man, and was in some way or other associated with his father in the sovereignty, according to the ancient custom of the kings of Wessex.

Whilst legislation was thus employing a portion of the leisure which the king enjoyed, he was not ignorant that peace is best secured by a constant preparation for war. The great army of Danes which had so long over-run the island was now broken in battle, and had submitted to become a part and parcel of his subjects. His triumph was so complete, that the army of the formidable Hasting was fearful of encountering him in the flush of his victory, and after a short stay at Fulham, they carried their enmity and their devastations to foreign lands. That all the Danes in England were now at least nominally under the superior dominion of X Alfred, is evident from the fact, that his name is connected in all such legal instruments as have come down to us, with the name of the local prince by whom the particular territory was governed. The peace, which Alfred's success against the Danes procured him, lasted fifteen years,—a long period, contrasted with the brief breathing-time which they had formerly allowed him, between their attacks,—and every observation which the contemporary writers have left behind them, seems to indicate that this precious time was improved by the king to the best advantage. For the Danes, though broken and baffled of their principal object, which was conquest or plunder on a large scale, yet continued in small bodies to harass the English coasts, and to make descents in particular places. There were also numerous bodies of freebooters, who had occupied different forts and strong places on the coast, from which they

issued in their small fleets, and plundered English and Danes alike; such piratical squadrons have always sprung out of the contests which are carried on between two states, in a half-barbaric age, and more especially in a war between naval states, and in seas abounding in islands which present superior facilities for the growth and maintenance of a piratical navy^b.

The course of military and naval events in England between the years 878 and 893 presents little of much importance: no battles are recorded which could endanger the safety of the kingdom, or interfere with the plans of domestic utility which engaged the attention of the king. The warlike enterprise which the Danes undertook for the purpose of annoying the English, or which the latter made in their own defence, were few in number and of little magnitude, compared with the struggle for national existence from which they had escaped.

It may be convenient to follow the same mode in relating these minor campaigns, which has been adopted in describing the adventures of their old enemies in France, and to throw them all into one continuous narrative.

The first of these skirmishes took place by sea in 882; for Alfred, intent upon creating a navy^c, had

^b Witness the buccaneers of the West Indian islands, who grew out of the wars between the English and the Spaniards.

^c "About this time," says Turner, [p. 575, note 10.] "kings seem to have thought of navies. In 888, Mahomet, the Saracen king in Corduba, ordered ships to be built at Corduba, Hispali, and in other places where wood abounded. Of this king it is said, that as he was walking in his garden, a soldier exclaimed, 'What a beautiful place! what a delightful day! How charming would life be if death never came!'—'You are wrong,' answered Mahomet; 'if death never had

shewn no want of care or vigilance to make the best use of his prosperity, and continued to keep a watchful eye upon the coasts, which would be the first to suffer from the approach of a hostile fleet. It is not very clear who were the enemy that this year engaged the king's attention. Asser writes, that he "fought a battle against the pagan fleet, of which he captured two ships, having slain all who were on board; and the two commanders of two other ships, with all their crews, distressed by the battle, and the wounds which they had received, laid down their arms, and submitted to the king."

It has been supposed that these Danes were a part of the army of Hasting, who with his fleet had held the Loire in a state of blockade, and in consequence of a treaty with Louis the Third of France, into which they entered in 882, had nothing better to do than to make an attempt on the English coast^d.

These encounters with different bodies of the Danes, probably afforded salutary exercise to the fleets and armies of Alfred. So little knowledge could he obtain beforehand of either their preparations or their coming, that all his precautions were to a certain

come, I should not have reigned here.' Rod. Tol. Hist. Arab. c. 28. p. 24."

^d This is the opinion of Lappenberg, [vol. ii. p. 58.] who adds the following note, "Annal. Vedast. a. 882. 'Hludowicus vero rex Ligerim petiit, Nordmannos volens e regno suo ejicere, atque Alstingum in amicitiam recipere, quod et fecit.' Hincmar. Rhem. h. a. 'Hastingus et complices illius Nordmanni ex Ligeri egressi, maritimas partes petierunt.' Depping has overlooked this negotiation. As we know that Hasting or Alsting was in this movement, we may with the less scruple recognise him as the king of the Northmen, Hals, who in this year was present at the battle of Haslo. See Annal. Fuld."

degree ineffectual: whilst his troops were occupied in resisting some of them in one place, other bodies succeeded in landing elsewhere. Among other causes of alarm, an urgent demand for help reached the king in 884 from the city of Rochester, which for a short time was in danger of being taken by the enemy. The occasion of its peril was this. We have seen that the great Danish army which was in France had divided into two bodies. One of them had marched towards the East, "the other," says Asser, who has given us the fullest account of this event, "coming to Britain, entered Kent, where they besieged a city called in Saxon Rochester, and situated on the eastern bank of the river Medway. Before the gate of the town the pagans suddenly erected a strong fortress, but they were unable to take the city, because the citizens defended themselves bravely until King Alfred came up to help them with a large army. Then the pagans abandoned their fortress, and all their horses which they had brought with them out of France; and leaving behind them at the fortress the greater part of their prisoners, on the arrival of the king, they fled immediately to their ships, and the Saxons seized on the prisoners* and horses which they had left: thus the pagans, compelled by stern necessity, returned the same summer to France."

This success was followed up by a naval expedition, which the king planned in the same year against the piratical Danes, who occupied the coasts of East Anglia. The army, which had relieved Rochester, were speedily embarked, and the fleet, "full of fighting men, proceeded out of Kent into East Anglia, for the

* Probably slaves, who would be as useful to the Saxons as to the Danes.

sake of plunder; and when they arrived at the mouth of the river Stour^f, immediately thirteen^g ships of the pagans met them, prepared for battle; a fierce fight ensued, and all the pagans, after a brave resistance, were slain; all the ships with all their money were taken. But after this, while the royal fleet were reposing, the pagans, who lived in the eastern part of England, assembled their ships, met the same royal fleet at sea in the mouth of the same river, and, after a naval battle, the pagans gained the victory^h."

This defeat seems, however, to have produced no serious results, and may perhaps have been nothing more than a repulse occasioned by a surprise, or by the superior numbers of the enemy. The war consequently again languished or degenerated into small skirmishes, which have not been thought worthy of notice by the chroniclers and early historians. But the expressions of that obscure writer Ethelwerd, as far as it is possible to understand them, seem to corroborate the brief statement, which is found in all the six chroniclers, that in 884 or 885 the East-Anglian Danes broke the treaty which they had made with Alfred. In the inflated language of Ethelwerd, the Danish army that was besieging Rochester, was a "foul plague," which,

^f Spelman seems to have taken this for the river Stour in Kent. But as Hearne in his note to the passage, [p. 74.] has justly remarked, "he that attentively reads the story, as related by Asser and the Saxon Annals, will conclude, that 'twas in East Anglia, which contained Norfolk, Suffolk, &c. Therefore Mr. Lambard [*Perambulation of Kent*, p. 262.] thinks it happened at the same place now called Harwich Haven. For that river which is of the same name with this in Kent divideth Essex from Suffolk, and not far from the head thereof in Essex standeth a town yet called Sturmore."

^g Some of the chroniclers say *sixteen*.

^h Asser.

when overcome by the king, looked round for reinforcements. Some of them made for the sea-coasts; and the same year they renewed their league, and gave hostages to the English, and twice in the year they counted the spoil which they had obtained by fraud, in the land which borders on the southern bank of the Thames. The filthy crew, which were then in possession of the East-Angles, suddenly removed to a place called Bamfleet, and there the allied band divided; some of them remained, and some of them went "beyond the sea." To reduce these incoherent expressions to sense and order, is perhaps impossible: they seem to point to some combinations between the rebellious East-Anglian Danes and the detachment from abroad, which was compelled to raise the siege of Rochester: but as the chroniclers have not transmitted to us any evil consequences arising to Alfred or his kingdom from this breach of the peace, it is probable that tranquillity was soon restored¹.

¹ I subjoin a long extract from Lappenberg, in which he attempts to clear up the obscurity which has always hung over the supposed connection of Alfred with Rollo, which has been slightly alluded to in page 159 of this volume. "Notwithstanding this misfortune"—i. e. the defeat of his fleet in the mouth of the river Stour—"Ælfred soon reestablished his feudal superiority in East-Anglia, and it even appears that he would have driven Guthrum-Æthelstan from the country, had not the latter received timely help from Rollo, the first duke of Normandy. This chieftain, the exiled son of Rögnvald, jarl of Møre, had come to England in the year 875, immediately after the battle of Hafursfiord, which had reduced all the petty kings of Norway under the subjection of King Harald Harfagr, had entered into a friendly intercourse with Guthrum, and, as the saga tells us, had, in consequence of a significant dream, [*see Dudo*,] betaken himself to the banks of the Seine. He had withdrawn from the siege of Paris, at the period of Alfred's attack on Guthrum, for the purpose of aiding the latter, in which he so fully succeeded, that Guthrum

made him the offer of the half of his kingdom, but which Rollo declined, as well as his invitation to adopt the Christian faith."

In this manner we explain the extraordinary account of the later historians, that Rollo was in alliance with King Ælfred, and, for the purpose of saving him, had hastened from the gates of Paris. The oldest historian of Normandy, Dudo of St. Quentin, relates, that these transactions took place between Rollo and Alstenius or Æthelstan king of the Angles. [In Dudo, p. 78. it is remarkable that he calls the enemies of Alstan, king of the Angli, also *Anglos*. See also Malmesb. de gestis Pont. ap. Gale, t. i. p. 363.] Under this name the grandson of Ælfred had been understood by the followers of Dudo, perhaps even by Dudo himself, and afterwards by an uncritical writer, John Wallingford, who has made the remark, that, as this Æthelstan lived later than Rollo, he must have been confounded with Ælfred, which supposition has been the cause of serious difficulties. But if we call to mind that Guthrum at his baptism assumed the name of Æthelstan, and must have been known under that name to the Norman ecclesiastical writers, the riddle is simply and satisfactorily solved, and we again see how a distorted tradition may contain a valuable historic fact.

The passage of Wallingford (ap. Gale, t. i. p. 214.) is found under the reign of Æthelstan: "' Reservavit ad istum regem quod superius dixi de Alfredo et Rollone scriptor Historiæ Normannorum (sc. W. of Jumieges, lib. ii. c. 4. from Dudo,) quod nequaquam stare potest, quum Rollo usque ad Ealstani regnum ex ipso ejus volumine et chronicorum supputatione convinci possit non pervenisse. Sed et multi alii historici, ob auctoritatem Ealstani, ad eum referunt quæ ad eum constat non pertinere.' In the oldest Welsh annals we find him or his successor called *king of the Saxons*: Annal. Camb. a. 898. ' Ealstan rex Saxonum obiit.' " LAPP. vol. ii. p. 60.

CHAP. XX.

SECOND PERIOD OF ALFRED'S LIFE—ENGLAND ENJOYS COMPARATIVE TRANQUILLITY DURING FIFTEEN YEARS, FROM 878 TO 893.—ALFRED'S POWER MORE EXTENSIVE THAN BEFORE THE DANISH INVASIONS—HIS ENDEAVOURS TO AMEND THE CONDITION OF HIS PEOPLE—HE INVITES PLEGMUND, WERFRITH, ETHELSTAN, AND WERWOLF OUT OF MERCIA, ASSER OUT OF WALES, GRIMBALD AND JOHN OF CORBEY (NOT ERIGENA) OUT OF FRANCE.

THE reign of Alfred may be divided into three periods, according to the varied character of the events which predominated at different times. The first period comprehends seven years, from his accession to the throne in 871 to his defeat at Chippenham, and expulsion from his throne in 878. This part of his life is diversified by few occurrences, which were thought worthy to be transmitted to posterity, though it comprises the two last attempts which the Danes made to reduce Wessex to the state of servitude, in which the rest of the island was bound. The short and decisive campaign, which first threw this able wrestler, and afterwards raised him from his fall stronger and more vigorous than before, may be looked on as one of those tests, by which superior talents occasionally are tried. It was a necessary discipline for the king's mind; for a king must not engross himself too deeply in the arts of peace alone; or devote the whole of his time to learning and religion. If then Alfred had sunk under the trial to which his firmness was exposed in 878, if he had

fled to a safer home, and left his kingdom a prey to the barbarians, his name would have come down to us, not as the focus of glories that will ever dazzle the eye and fill the mind of those who contemplate them, but as the worthy contemporary and equal of Burghed king of Mercia, and other kings, who in the age immediately preceding that of Alfred, made no scruple to abandon the high and useful stations in which Providence had placed them.

But of those who read the achievements of Alfred at the head of his army in the field, or in his fleet on the bosom of the wave, who is there that cannot perceive how uncongenial those fierce and brutalizing occupations must have been, to his fine and enlightened intellect? How would he have rejoiced, if his lot had been cast in an age when literary taste and the triumphs of the mind outweighed all the victories that could be achieved by the sword! A book was to King Alfred an inestimable treasure, and learning was the greatest enjoyment he could possess. So clear is this from the whole history of his life, that even the legendary tale which we have related concerning the vision of St. Cuthbert, as he sat alone in the solitary island, represents him as engaged in the perusal of a book, and with it almost reading himself to sleep^a! How then must the king have rejoiced in the reality of that peaceful time, which formed the second period of his reign! His valour in the field against the enemies of his country was at length amply rewarded with the tranquillity which he coveted. The baffled enemies looked from a distance with an envious eye, but with terror at their hearts, upon the exaltation of their conqueror; or if they dared again to annoy him, it was

^a See page 226—9.

// in faint and ill-supported attacks, which kept his arms brightened, and taught his soldiers their duty, without in the slightest degree diminishing his prosperity or dimming his glories. Now then may we expect to find the real character of the king display itself: this is that period of his reign which has conferred on him the title of GREAT, or at least has given him a claim to that title much stronger than that which he had earned by his previous success in war. It does not appear, indeed, that the first part of Alfred's reign exhibits marks of any peculiar excellence beyond several of the kings who reigned in Wessex before him. It is true that he acted like a brave prince in the numerous battles, where, in conjunction with the brother Ethelred, he stemmed the torrent of the first Danish invasion. He also displayed equal courage when he was left alone by his brother's death to defend the liberty of his country; and though his last campaign against Guthrum's victorious host was as brilliant as a warrior who aspires after military glory could desire, yet something was still wanting to ensure for Alfred that epithet which is now inseparably united with his name. If then we would discover by what deeds Alfred has earned this superior rank in the estimation of mankind, we must view all his former deeds only as paving the way for that which was to follow, and we must seek his true glories in what he accomplished during the fifteen years of tranquillity, which he gained by his former seven years of war.

The first advantage which occurred to England from the actions of her great king was the consolidation of the states of the Heptarchy into one. Four independent monarchies, Wessex, Northumberland, East Anglia, and Mercia, still existed, when the violence of the Danish

invasions first fell upon the island. Three of the separate kingdoms, East Anglia, Northumberland, and Mercia, were successively and speedily humbled to the dust by the fierce northmen; but when the victors were in their turn subjugated by the king of Wessex, the Saxon kingdoms which they had occupied fell also with them into Alfred's hands, and thus was presented an opportunity, which had never occurred before, of uniting all England into one kingdom, and under the sovereignty of one king. But there were still circumstances which prevented this union from instantly taking effect. The rebellious spirits of the Danish soldiery, though humbled by defeat, required gentle treatment; and it was the king's policy to convert them into husbandmen and useful citizens, not to drive them to despair, or irritate them by bringing them continually into contact with his own superior authority. Hence the intermediate authority of their own king Guthrum was useful for a time, to mould them into a more pliable form, and to teach them by degrees to become his own subjects. Guthrum died in 890^b, and one Eohric or Eric becoming king, reigned fourteen years^c, until 905, when he was slain in battle against the army of Edward the Elder, king of Wessex, and his kingdom ceased to exist as a separate state^d.

The fortunes of Northumberland were similar to those of East Anglia: the obscure Egbert who ruled in Bernicia, and Guthred who governed Deira, were the last kings of those northern provinces. Egbert first disappears from our view, and Guthred^e died

^b Sax. Chron. Eth. Flor. Sim. Hunt.

^c Flor. Wig. p. 262.

^d Sax. Ch. 905.

^e Ethelwerd [an. 896.] calls him Guthfridus, and says that he was buried in York cathedral.

at York, on St. Bartholomew's day, A. D. 894, just after the commencement of the contest which Alfred waged, as we shall presently relate, with Hasting, the most skilful general of his enemies the Northmen. Guthred left three sons^f, Niel, Sigtric, and Ragnald, who in later days recovered their paternal rights in Northumberland, though, immediately after their father's death, Alfred succeeded in establishing his supremacy over that country.

The kingdom of Mercia, left vacant by the death of Burhred, and then held for a time by the imbecile Ceolwolf, until he resigned it to the Danes, never recovered its independence, or existed even as a subordinate kingdom. Lying between the contending Danes and Anglo-Saxons, it underwent that partition to which its situation made it liable. The boundary settled by the treaty of Alfred and Guthrum represents the frontier between the two races of people who now predominated in the two parts of the island. A considerable portion of Mercia was resigned to the Danes, though perhaps the greater part of it, namely its western districts, which were called Hwiccas, were now united to Wessex. But Mercia, even thus partitioned,

^f " This interesting information is found in the extracts from the lost *Gesta Anglorum* in Adam of Bremen, lib. i. c. 35. (Nordmanni), ' in Angliam quoque miserunt unum ex sociis Haldani, qui dum ab Anglis occideretur, Dani in locum ipsius Gudredum constituerunt. Ipse autem Northumbriam expugnavit, atque ex illo tempore Fresia et Anglia in ditione Danorum esse feruntur. Scriptum est in *Gestis Anglorum*.' Lib. ii. c. 15. ' Anglia autem, ut supra diximus, et in *Gestis Anglorum* scribitur, post montem Gudredi a filiis ejus Analaf (*sic*), Sightric et Reginold, per annos fere centum, permansit in ditione Danorum.' The usually received opinion, that Sihtric and his brothers were sons of Ivar, rests on an interpretation of the *Annals of Ulster*. See also *Sax. Chron.* a. 921. *Sim. Dun.* 914." LAPPENBERG, ii. p. 62.

still retained so much of its original constitution, that whilst the appellations *Dena-lagu*, or *Dane-lagh*, and *West-Saxena-lagu*, respectively described the kingdoms in which the Danish and Saxon laws severally prevailed, the Mercians had their own denomination *Mercena-lagu*; and these three names, applied originally to different codes of laws, came now to mark out the countries in which those laws were in force. The Saxon part of Mercia was governed, not by a king, but an alderman or earl, and the first officer of this name was Ethelred, the son-in-law of Alfred^g, who probably had large landed estates in Mercia, or otherwise possessed influence in that country; for we find that he assembled the witenagemot at Gloucester, at which a large number of bishops and nobles were present. After the death of Ethelred, his wife^h governed the country under the title of *Hlæfdige* or Lady of the Mercians, for the law which excluded females from regal honours seems to have been limited to Wessex, and not to have held good even in the country of Edburga, whose crimes originated it.

But besides the states which lay within the limits of our modern England, there were many petty kings and princes beyond the Welsh frontier, who had acknowledged submission to the superior power of Alfred; this is attested by Asser, who was himself a

^g "I see no reason, with Wanley and Smith, to doubt the genuineness of the document of 884, (Smith's *Beda*, p. 771,) in which Æthelred speaks of himself, '*principatu et domino gentis Merciorum suffultus*,'—'*gentis Merciorum ducatum gubernans*.' What Asser, a. 886, says, is merely that the comes Merciorum at that time received possession of London. Florence, a. 894, calls him '*subregulus*;' Ethelwerd, '*rex*.'" THORPE'S LAPPENBERG, vol. ii. p. 63.

^h Alfred's daughter Ethelswitha.

Welshman, and was afterwards advanced to great favour at the court of that king.

“At this time, [884,]” says he, “and long before, all the countries on the right hand side of Britain belonged to King Alfred, and still belong to him. For instance, King Hemeid, with all the inhabitants of the region of Demetia, compelled by the violence of the six sons of Rotri, had submitted to the dominion of the king. Howel, also, son of Ris, king of Gleguising, and Brocmail, and Fernmail, sons of Mouric, kings of Gwent, fled of their own accord from the tyranny and violence of Ethelred and the Mercians, to King Alfred, that they might enjoy his government and protection against their enemies. Helised also, son of Tendyr, king of Brecon, compelled by the force of the same sons of Rotri, voluntarily sought the government of the aforesaid king; and Anarawd, son of Rotri, with his brother, at length abandoning the friendship of the Northumbrians, from which he received no good but harm, came into King Alfred’s presence, and eagerly sought his friendship. The king received him honourably, adopted him as his son by confirmation from the bishop’s hand, and presented him with many gifts. Thus he became subject to the king with all his people, on the same condition that he should be obedient to the king’s will in all respects, in the same way as Ethelred and the Mercians. Nor was it in vain that all these princes gained the friendship of the king. For those who desired to augment their worldly power, obtained power; those who coveted money, gained money; and in like way, those who wished for his friendship, or both money and friendship together, succeeded in getting what they wanted. But all of them gained his love and guar-

dianship, and defence from every quarter, even as the king with his men could protect himself." It appears then, from this cursory view of the state of England, that the actual dominions of Alfred were augmented by the wars which he had waged, and the jealousies, which once existed between the rival Anglo-Saxon states, were now consumed and reduced to a heap of ashes, by the terrible conflagration which had swept across the island. It behoves us now to consider by what means the king succeeded in raising a fresh vitality over the smouldering ruins, and to give a new vigour to the sceptre which he transmitted to his descendants, more powerful than he had received it from the kings who reigned before him.

In this enquiry we shall have to consider both the private and the public life of the king, the measures which he took to regulate the finances of the country, to protect it from foreign enemies and from domestic tumults: the affairs of the Church, of religion generally, and of literature, will all pass in review before us, for there was no department of the public interest which the king did not himself assist to regulate, whilst his private life, as William of Malmesbury observes, was beyond measure to be admired, and "celebrated with the highest praise." To illustrate this subject, the biography of Asser furnishes us with information of the deepest interest, and is, in fact, the source, from which all have drawn, who have written, directly or indirectly, on the history of this king.

Of the difficulties, which lay in Alfred's path, when he at last saw peace restored, and the opportunity which he had so long desired, at last offered, for improving the people, whom he was called upon to govern, the isolated position, in which he stood, was

by far the most formidable. Since the death of his brothers, he stood alone in the world, and was removed as far above his subjects in the qualities of the mind, as by the regal authority which he held. When he was a boy, he could not find teachers to direct his own studies, and now that he possessed the power to promote the reforms which he meditated, and to improve the social and political condition of his subjects, he had difficulty in finding persons to cooperate with him in this laudable work. This was then his first endeavour, which he lost no opportunity of promoting, "to procure," as Asser^h tells us, "coadjutors in his good designs, to aid him in his strivings after wisdom, that he might attain to what he aimed at; and therefore, like a prudent bird, which, rising in summer with the early morning from her beloved nest, steers her rapid flight through the uncertain tracks of æther, and descends on the manifold and varied flowers of grasses, herbs and shrubs, essaying that which pleases most, that she may bear it to her home, so did he direct his eyes afar, and seek without that which he had not within, namely, in his own kingdom."

It was from Mercia, principally, that Alfred obtained the assistance which he sought. "As some encouragement to his benevolent intentions," continues the biographer, "God, listening to his complaint, sent certain lights to illuminate him, namely, Werfrith, bishop of the Church of Worcester, a man well versed in the Divine Scriptures, who, by the king's command, first turned the books of the Dialogues of Pope Gregory and Peter, his disciple, from Latin into Saxon, and, sometimes, putting sense for sense, interpreted them with clearness and elegance. After him was Pleg-

^h Vita Alfredi, sub a. 884.

mund, a Mercian by birth, archbishop of the Church of Canterbury, a venerable man, and endowed with wisdom: with whom came Ethelstan and Werwolf, his priests and chaplains, Mercians by birth, and men of erudition. These four had been invited out of Mercia by King Alfred, who exalted them with many honours and powers in the kingdom of the West-Saxons, besides the privileges which Archbishop Plegmund, and Bishop Werfrith, enjoyed in Mercia. By their teaching and wisdom the king's desires increased unceasingly, and were daily gratified. Night and day, whenever he had leisure, he commanded such men as these to read books to him: for he never suffered himself to be without one of them, wherefore he possessed a knowledge of every book, though of himself he could not yet understand any thing of books, for he had not yet learned to read any thing."

But it would seem that Mercia could not supply a sufficient number of ecclesiastics and teachers to gratify the "commendable avarice" of the king, the continent of Europe was searched to increase the number, "he sent messengers to procure teachers out of Gaul, and invited from thence Grimbald, priest and monk, a venerable man, and a good singer, adorned with every kind of ecclesiastical discipline and good morals, and most learned in holy Scripture. He also obtained from thence John, also a priest and monk, a man of most energetic talents, learned in all kinds of literary science, and skilled in many other arts. By the teaching of these men the king's mind was greatly enlarged, and he, in return, gave them much riches, and honoured them with much influence." The ecclesiastics, whom Alfred thus invited from abroad, were men who had obtained a high reputation for learning in their own

country. John of Corvey, in Old Saxony, was the priest and monk so famous both in literature and science, and Grimbald was Provost of St. Omer's in France. To procure the grant of his services from his ecclesiastical superior, Fulk, Archbishop of Rheims, without whose consent he could not leave France, Alfred dispatched an embassy, consisting of several bishops and others, ecclesiastics and laymen. The ambassadors bore with them large presents for the archbishop, and pledged themselves in their master's name, that Grimbald should be well received and highly honoured in England as long as he lived. Fulk, the archbishop, wrote back a letter to Alfred, in which he signified his assent to the king's request, though the loss of the eminent scholar would give much pain to himself. These particulars have come down to us in the letter itself which Fulk wrote to Alfred on this occasion, and which is still preservedⁱ. It is a curious supplement to the narrative which we have given above from the biography of Asser.

It was about the same time that Asser, from whose biography we are enabled to extract these interesting reminiscences, was first introduced to the king. He was a native of Wales, or, as he calls it, Western Britain, and was now invited by the king to take up his residence in Saxony. Accordingly he traversed the many intervening provinces which lay in his road, and, under the guidance of some Saxons, who had no doubt been sent to escort him, he came into Sussex, and first saw the king at the royal vill of Dene. His reception by Alfred, and the sequel of their interview, shall be told in Asser's own words.

ⁱ See the Appendix, No. V. William of Malmesbury tells us [*an.* 893.] that Alfred was kindly entertained by this Fulk, when he was a child on his way to Rome many years before: see page 51.

“ He received me with kindness, and, among other familiar conversation, he asked me eagerly to devote myself to his service and become his friend, to leave every thing I possessed on the left or western bank of the Severn, and he promised to give me more than an equivalent for it in his own dominions. I replied, that I could not incautiously and rashly promise such things; for it seemed to me unjust, that I should leave those sacred places in which I had been bred, educated, crowned^k, and at last ordained, for the sake of any earthly honour and power, unless I was compelled to do so. Upon which he said,^l If you cannot accede to this, at least let me have your service in part: spend six months of the year with me here, and the other six in Britain.’ To this I replied, that I could not even promise that too easily or hastily, without the advice of my friends. At length, however, when I perceived that he was anxious for my services, though I knew not why, I promised him that, if my life was spared, I would return to him after six months, with such a reply as should be agreeable to him, as well as advantageous to me and mine.’ With this answer he was satisfied, and, when I had given him a pledge to return at the appointed time, on the fourth day we left him, and returned on horseback towards our own country.

“ After our departure, a violent fever seized me in the city of Winchester, where I lay twelve months and one week, night and day, without hope of recovery. At the appointed time, therefore, I could not fulfil my promise of visiting him, and he sent messengers to hasten my journey, and to enquire the cause of my delay. As I was unable to ride to him, I sent a second messenger to him stating the cause of the delay, and to assure him that, if I recovered from my infirmity, I

^k i. e. received the monastic tonsure.

would fulfil what I had promised. My complaint at last left me, and by the advice and consent of all my friends, for the benefit of that holy place, and of all who dwelt therein, I did as I had promised to the king, and devoted myself to his service, on the condition that I should remain with him six months in every year, either continuously, if I should find it possible to spend six months with him at once; or alternately, three months in Britain, and three in Saxony."

The motives which induced Asser's friends and the brethren of the monastery to which he belonged, are plainly told: "For my friends hoped that they should sustain less annoyance and harm from King Hemeid, who often plundered our monastery and the parish of St. Deguus, and sometimes expelled the prelates, as they expelled Archbishop Novis my relation, and myself; which would no longer be done, if in any manner I could secure the notice and friendship of the king."

The illness which fell on Asser at Winchester, as he was returning to Wales, prevented him for more than a year from fulfilling the promise which he had made to the king. At length, however, he again came into his presence at the royal vill of Leonasford; the narrative proceeds thus:

"I was honourably received by him, and remained that time with him at court eight months; during which I read to him whatever books he liked, and such as he had at hand; for this is his most usual custom, night and day, in the midst of his many other occupations of mind and body, either himself to read books, or to listen whilst others read them. And when I frequently asked his leave to depart, and could in no way obtain it, at length, when I had made up my mind by all means to demand it, he called me to him at

twilight on Christmas eve, and gave me two letters, in which was a long list of all the things which were in two monasteries, called, in the Saxon tongue, Ambresbury and Banwell; and on that same day he delivered to me those two monasteries, with all the things that were in them, and a silken pall of great value, and a load for a strong man of incense; adding these words, that he did not give me these trifling presents, because he was unwilling hereafter to give me greater; for in the course of time he unexpectedly gave me Exeter, with all the diocese which belonged to him in Saxony, and in Cornwall, besides gifts every day, without number, in every kind of worldly wealth, which it would be too long to enumerate here, lest they should make my reader tired. But let no one suppose that I have mentioned these presents in this place for the sake of glory or flattery, or that I may obtain greater honour. I call God to witness that I have not done so; but that I might certify to those who are ignorant of it, how profuse the king is in giving. He then immediately gave me permission to ride to those two rich monasteries, and afterwards to return to my own country^k."

Besides the eminent scholars whose attendance on Alfred is confirmed by the testimony of Asser, we are told that the celebrated John Erigena, the Scot or Irishman, came with the rest to adorn the court of Alfred. This John had "long since," writes William of Malmesbury, "from the continued tumult of war around him, retired into France to Charles the Bald, at whose request he had translated the *Hierarchia* of Dionysius the Areopagite, word for word, out of the Greek into Latin. He composed a book also, which he entitled, 'On the Division of Nature,' an extremely

^k Vita Alfredi, an. 884.

useful work for solving certain perplexing but necessary questions, if we only pardon his having deviated a little in some things from the doctrines of the Latins, out of too great attention to the Greeks. In after times, allured by the munificence of Alfred, he came into England, and at our monastery [*Malmesbury*], as report says, was pierced with the iron styles¹ of the boys whom he was instructing, and was even looked upon as a martyr; which phrase I have not made use of to the disparagement of his holy spirit, as though it were matter of doubt, especially as his tomb on the left side of the altar, and the verses of his epitaph, record his fame. These, though rugged and deficient in the polish of our own days, are not so uncouth for ancient times:

Here lies a saint, the sophist John, whose days
On earth were graced with deepest learning's praise:
Deem'd meet at last by martyrdom to gain
Christ's kingdom, where the saints for ever reign."

But, notwithstanding that we have the authority of so respectable a writer for believing that John Erigena was at the Court of Alfred, yet it is more probable that Malmesbury has confused him with John of Corbey, before mentioned; for Asser, who had daily opportunities of seeing and knowing all Alfred's ecclesiastics, would hardly have taken notice of inferior scholars, to the disparagement of one so deservedly celebrated as Erigena^m.

¹ For writing on wax tablets.

^m Erigena is thought to have died in France before 877: but nothing is certain on the subject.

CHAP. XXI.

ALFRED'S NAVY—HIS GENERAL OFFICERS—AND FORTRESSES—HIS ADMONITIONS TO BUILD CASTLES NEGLECTED—OF THE CITIES WHICH HE BUILT OR RESTORED—THE KING'S ZEAL FOR RELIGION—HIS HEARING OF THE SCRIPTURES—BUILDS MONASTERIES AT ATHELNEY, SHAFTESBURY, THE NEW MINSTER AT WINCHESTER—ALFRED'S CHILDREN—THEIR EDUCATION—THE SCHOOL FOR THE SONS OF THE NOBILITY—NO UNIVERSITIES IN THOSE TIMES—SUPPOSITION THAT ALFRED WAS NOT IN FAVOUR AT ROME.

WHEN Alfred had secured the assistance of the eminent men whom we have enumerated, he gave his whole soul to the important subject which he had in hand. His object was twofold: to set the kingdom, which he ruled, in such a state of defence, that if the enemies who had so terribly ravaged it should return, his people might be in a state of preparation to receive them; and also to improve their social condition, and to raise them to a higher state of intellectual attainment than had hitherto existed among themselves or their rude ancestors. These objects, which are commensurate with the distinction between peace and war, are the greatest which the mind of a king can compass; and that they now engrossed all Alfred's attention, is evident from the description which the ancient writers have left us concerning this portion of his life. The most important of these objects was doubtlessly the defence

and security of the kingdom against a recurrence of the evils which for many years had afflicted it. The king's prudent judgment would readily see, that all the improvements of civilization would be premature, if they were liable to be suddenly cast down by the assaults of a barbarous enemy; and his acuteness of perception could not but point out to him, that the enemy, although repulsed, was still at his very gates, ready to take advantage of any opening which should be left in his defences. Nor was the king's foresight bestowed in vain, for, as we shall presently see, the Danish hosts again fell upon him like a thunder-storm, and put the existence of his kingdom in jeopardy, almost before his means of opposing them were completed.

It was obviously necessary, to ensure the safety of England from its foreign enemies, that Alfred should possess an efficient fleet to guard the coasts, an able body of officers to organize and command the forces of each district, and a line of fortresses to serve as magazines, or rallying points for his armies, and as a check to the enemy, until reinforcements could arrive. Our knowledge of Alfred's navy is obtained less by its description than by its results. It appears, that the improvement which he introduced into ship-building, contributed principally to the successes which he gained by sea. Asser tells us, that he "commanded boats and galleys, i. e. long ships, to be built throughout the kingdom, in order to offer battle to the enemy as they were coming^a." The peculiarities of these new galleys are pointed out by Florence of Worcester: "they were twice as long, twice as high, sailed more quickly, and were less

^a Asser, an. 877. His expression is, "cymbas et galeas, i. e. longas naves."

unsteady than those of the Danes^b;" "some of these ships had sixty oars, some had more; . . . they were shaped neither like the Frisian nor the Danish, but as it seemed to Alfred that they would be most efficient in the service for which they were designed^c." And to this novel construction may probably be ascribed the success which Alfred almost always experienced by sea, from the first moment that he turned his thoughts to naval tactics^d. We have

^b Anno 897.

^c Sax. Ch. an. 897.

^d Sir John Spelman expresses his inability to comprehend the advantages which Alfred's mode of construction are said to have imparted to his ships. His remarks are worth noticing: "How the ships should be so exceeding high as to double the height of the Danish ships, (when they went not with sails but oars,) I cannot well imagine, unless that, for the better receipt of soldiers, and their greater advantage in fighting, (which in those grappling sea-fights consisted wholly in the superiority of standing,) they had a plain level deck, above the room that the rowers sat in, and from thence with great odds of advantage annoyed those they sat upon: otherwise their height, that so much advantaged them in fight, would as much disadvantage them in speedy rowing. As for their steadiness, that argues their greatness and burden, whereby they drew the more water; which though it were an hindrance to their speed, (for the greater the body, the slower the motion,) yet that was borne out with an answerable number of rowers which their length afforded.

"If this apprehension seem difficult, then may we reckon the height spoken of to be meant of the height of their poops only, and not of the height of the whole sides of the ships, and so we may think them to have retained somewhat of the fashion of those of the Veneti, with whom when Cæsar fought, the height of their poops exceeded the tops of the fighting-turrets that were in Cæsar's ships: but those ships of the Veneti went not with oars, but with sails of leather, and these either only or chiefly with oars.

"If further we enquire after the form of shipping used by the Saxons, Tacitus [De mor. Germ.] tells us, that the Suiones (who were part of the Suevians, as the Saxons were) used a kind of shipping in the Baltic sea very rude and plain, that was high before

already seen, that the difficulty which principally attends the first construction of a navy, namely, to procure sailors by whom the ships may be manned, did not exist at this time, for there were swarms of pirates and private adventurers, covering all the face of the northern seas, and ready to take service wherever a sufficient compensation was offered to them. There can be no doubt that a large number of sailors were included among the "many Franks, Frisons, Gauls, Pagans [*i. e.* *Danes*], Britons, Scots, and Armoricans, noble and ignoble, who," as Asser tells us, "submitted voluntarily to his dominion^e;" and as they "all of them, according to their nation and their merits, were ruled, loved, honoured, and enriched with money and power^f," it is not surprising that Alfred's endeavours were successful, or that his fleet speedily became equal to the task of defending his coasts, and even of assailing the enemy upon their own element.

As the creation and maintenance of a navy occupied an important place in the king's thoughts, so has it also been asserted by almost all succeeding writers, that he improved the use and practice of arms, to the great

and behind, and made indifferent to go with either end forward, but forced only with oars, which they did not use in any constant, fixed seats of rowing, but removed to and fro to any end or part of their ships, as occasion served, (as we may see them do in our cock-boats and lighters.) These were slow for any service, though Tacitus counts the Suiones to be somebody in shipping. Whether the Saxons came over in such vessels, and whether they continued the use of them, or found here a better form, I shall leave to the disquisition of others. It is sufficient to our purpose to shew, that, whatsoever they formerly were, the king augmented the use of them, both in number and condition, over what they were before his coming to the crown." *LIFE OF ALFRED*, p. 151.

* An. 884.

^f Ibid.

advancement of military discipline : but, as has been remarked by Sir John Spelman on this subject^s, “ had the particulars of his ordinances in that behalf remained unto us, there is no doubt but they would have afforded matter both to his glory, and to the delight (and use perhaps) of posterity : but such particulars failing, there yet are manifest demonstrations, that he did much in that kind, and to very good purpose.” It is probable that many institutions, already in existence before the accession of Alfred, have been ascribed, by the fond admiration of posterity, to the invention of their favourite king ; as instances of which we may adduce the well-known and long-established dignity of earl or alderman, and probably others whose origin is lost in antiquity : yet that Alfred modified the military system of the Anglo-Saxons and put it on a more efficient basis, is evidently to be inferred from several passages of the old chroniclers ; it is probable that the ancient officers of the kingdom, aldermen and others, were

^s Life of Alfred, p. 147. “ John Hardyng,” observes Hearne, [p. 149.] “ sums up the king’s military performances in the following words : [Chron. f. 108. b.]

And in the year viii C. lxxx and eighteen
 Then Alured this noble king so died :
 When he had reigned xxix year clean
 And with the Danes in battles multiplied
 He faughten often, as Colman notified
 In his Chronicle and in his Catalogue
 Entitled well, as in his dialogue.
 That fifty battailles and six he smote,
 Sometime the worse and sometime had the better,
 Sometime the field he had, as it is note,
 Sometime he fled away, as saith the letter,
 Like as Fortune his cause left unfeter.
 But nevertheless as oft when so they came,
 He countered them and kept the land from shame.”

entrusted with the care of defending their own particular districts, and calling out the militia, whenever an enemy should appear. The names of several of Alfred's officers have come down to us; some of them have obtained distinction, like Odun, alderman of Devonshire, for their victories over the enemy. The division of the kingdom into counties, for military purposes, begins more fully to display itself: thus we read of Ethelelm, the earl or alderman of Wiltshire^b, Bertwolf duke—or earl, for the titles have the same meaning—of Essexⁱ, Edwolf, the king's minister in Sussex^k, Earl Ceolmund in Kent^l, Edred, duke of Devonshire, probably successor to the brave Odun^m, and several others. We even read of bishops, whose zeal, equalling that of their more celebrated successors, after the Normans came to England, prompted them—if they were not actually employed by the king for that purpose,—to enter the field and fight, like soldiers, in defence of their country's freedom. It would be an obvious idea to a mind less acute than that of Alfred, to employ these officers in the defence of their own provinces, and we find that they were so employed before Alfred became king; but however this may be, it is left on record, that the king adopted a more regular method than his predecessors to ensure the speedy assembling an army, if occasion should require. It was necessary that the fortresses throughout the kingdom should be manned with sufficient garrisons; and a certain number of men were yearly set aside for this important duty. The rest

^b Florence, p. 103. Sax. Ch. a. 898.

ⁱ Flor. p. 115.

^k Flor. p. 115.

^l Ibid. Matt. Westsaxon. an. 197. Godwin, fol 337.

^m Brompton, col. 832, n. 10. Hunt. an. 901.

were divided into two bodies ; half of them were left at home to till the lands and attend to their domestic concerns, whilst the other half were in attendance on the king, and ready^a to take the field against the enemy.

Closely connected with the necessity of having a well-organized army, was the manifest utility of maintaining the ancient fortresses of the kingdom, and erecting others wherever they might be required. It is to be lamented, that on this subject also the ancient writers give us no precise information or details of any kind. We may remark, that the Saxons were less skilled than their enemies, the Danes, in the construction and defence of fortresses. In fact, they appear to have neglected that mode of defending their country altogether, in consequence, perhaps, of the ease with which they had first subjugated the Britons, and the improbability of their being attacked in a country, which had the natural protection of the Ocean. It is observable, that the same city or fortress, which presents no impediment to the Danish armies, becomes, in their hands, a formidable barrier, which repels the assaults of the Saxons, and cannot be recovered except by a lengthened siege. Thus Reading, Exeter, Chippenham, Wareham, and other towns, fall an easy prey to the Danes, but when once fortified by those skilful engineers, they repulse even Alfred from their gates. This fact was not lost upon the capacious mind of the king : and he continually endeavoured to point out to his nobles the importance of this subject. In what manner his exhortations were received is told us by his biographer, and it is a sad example of the mortification which a spirit, that essays to soar above its

^a Flor. p. 101.

equals, is destined to suffer. “The king,” says Asser,—“besides the bodily disease which afflicted him, as I have before said,—was disturbed also by the quarrels of his friends, who would voluntarily endure little or no toil, though it was for the common necessity of the kingdom; but he alone, sustained by the Divine aid, like a skilful pilot, strove to steer his ship, laden with its cargo of wealth, into the safe and much-desired harbour of his country, though almost all his crew were tired, and suffered them not to faint or hesitate, whilst they were sailing amid the manifold waves and eddies of this present life. For all his bishops, earls, nobles, favourite ministers, and præfects, who, next to God and the king, had the whole government of the kingdom, as is fitting, continually received from him instruction, respect, exhortation, and command; nay, at last, when they were disobedient, and his long patience was exhausted, he would reprove them severely, and censure at pleasure their vulgar folly and obstinacy; and in this way, he directed their attention to the common interests of the kingdom. But, owing to the sluggishness of the people, these admonitions of the king were either not fulfilled, or were begun late at the moment of necessity, and so ended less to the advantage of those who put them in execution; for I will say nothing of the castles, which he ordered to be built, but which, being begun late, were never finished, because the hostile troops broke in upon them by land and sea, and, as often happened, these thwarters of the royal ordinances repented when it was too late, and blushed at their non-performance of his commands. I speak of repentance when it is too late, on the testimony of Scripture, whereby numberless persons have had cause for too much sorrow after

many insidious evils have been wrought. But, though by those means, sad to say, they may be roused to sorrow, and bitterly afflicted by the loss of fathers, wives, children, ministers, servant-men, servant-maids, and furniture and household-stuff, what is the use of hateful repentance when their kinsmen are dead, and they cannot aid them or redeem those who are captive from captivity? for they are not able even to assist those who have escaped, as they have not wherewith to sustain even their own lives. They repented, therefore, when it was too late, and grieved at their incautious neglect of the king's commands, and they praised the royal wisdom with one voice, and tried with all their power to fulfil what they had before refused, namely, concerning the erection of castles, and other things useful to the whole kingdom."

But, whilst the king's ministers neglected to fulfil their master's commands, and preferred, with true Saxon blood, to face their enemies in an open field of battle, rather than retire for safety behind the walls of a fortress, the king himself zealously discharged such of these duties which came under his own immediate care, and restored the towns and cities, that were dilapidated, to more than their former condition°. In

° Spelman seems to have thought that Alfred was the first to construct buildings of hewn stones, if we may judge by the following passage: "Neither was the reparation notable in regard of the greatness and universality only, but it was also of an extraordinary kind, both in regard of the materials, and of the new manner. You shall hear Asser's own words: *De civitatibus et urbibus renovandis, et aliis, ubi nunquam ante fuerant, construendis ædificiis, aureis et argenteis, incomparabiliter, illo edocente, fabricatis; de aulis et cameris regalibus, lapideis et ligneis, suo jussu mirabiliter constructis; de villis regalibus lapideis, antiqua positione mutatis, et in decentioribus locis regali imperio decentissime constructis* &c. For,

886, according to Asser, "after the burning of cities and the slaughter of his people, he honourably rebuilt the city of London, and made it again habitable. He gave it into the custody of his son-in-law Ethelred, earl of Mercia; for all the Angles and Saxons, who had before been dispersed every where, or were in captivity with the Pagans, voluntarily turned and submitted themselves to his dominion."

when the walls of towns and castles were but wood and combustible, (as we may see by those of York and Rochester that they generally then were,) stone buildings were very rare, till Alfred made them more frequent."

To which Hearne adds the following note. "Notwithstanding there be no express mention in any author of the forts and castles built by him, yet 'tis commonly reported that he was the founder of Middleton and Balford in Kent, of the Devizes in Wilts; and of Ælfreton in Derbyshire. Malmesbury also was restored by him after 'twas destroyed by the Danes. And I believe too that the city of Norwich was either repaired after some devastation, or else that it had some addition made to it by him. For in one of his coins, published by the ingenious Sir Andrew Fountaine, [tab. i. n. 9.] there is a monogram, which Mr. Edw. Thwaites, in his notes upon these coins, has ingeniously guessed to be CIVITAS NORTHVICUM: and I believe it was occasioned by his benefaction to the place, unless we rather think, with others, that it only denotes that 'twas coin'd here. I know indeed that Mr. Walker and some others, with whom Sir Andrew seems to agree, are of opinion that this coin belongs to Ælfred king of Northumberland: but what overthrows this opinion is the head itself, which does not much differ from the heads of King Ælfred the Great, which Mr. Walker himself has published. Nor, indeed, was Norwich a place of any note in the time of Ælfred king of Northumberland, as Mr. Camden has very well observed in his discourse upon this place; not now to insist upon the wreath, which encircles the head, and is more agreeable to the times of Ælfred the Great, than those of Ælfred king of Northumberland: and for that reason Mr. Selden, in his titles of honour, mentions it as his, and places it amongst his other observations concerning coronation in the western parts after the time of Charles the Great." LIFE OF ALFRED, p. 163.

In his own palaces, farms, and country-seats, of which he had a large number^p, the king set a laudable example to his neglectful earls and thanes; his architectural taste was lavishly displayed in the restorations and new creations, which his genius called forth in that department. These works were doubtless well known to his contemporaries, but the details of them have perished, or have never been written. The greatest works of man fall into obscurity, and become utterly unknown, when those who saw them with their own eyes, and were dazzled by their brilliancy, have omitted to record those facts which alone can preserve the memory of them to posterity. "What shall I say," continues Asser, "of the cities and towns which he restored, and of others which he built where none had been before? of the royal halls and chambers, wonderfully erected, by his command, with stone and wood? of his royal villas constructed of stone, removed from their old sites, and handsomely rebuilt, by the king's command, in more fitting places?"

Such duties as these must have occupied a large portion of the king's leisure, but there were others, some of them no less important, which demanded their share of his attention. The interests of Religion, of Literature, the Legislative and Judicial departments of the State, were all left by the intestine wars which had torn society in pieces, in a state more easy to be deplored than to be remedied. Of these we must now speak more fully. And first, of the king's endeavour to promote the interests of Religion.

For the last hundred and fifty years, preceding the reign of Alfred, and following the death of Venerable

^p See his Will in the Appendix.

Bede, a great change, and not for the better, had been gradually passing over the Anglo-Saxon mind. In Literature and Religion, which in those days were inseparably united, the zeal which was kindled in the time of Venerable Bede, and fostered by his own bright example, had long waxed cold: no name of importance occurs during that long period, and, when Alfred came to the throne, it was not the least pressing of the arduous duties that devolved on him, to raise his subjects from the inglorious apathy into which they had fallen on all that regarded their intellectual and moral culture. It was for this object above all others that Alfred had gathered from every side those pious and learned churchmen, whose names and virtues have been already enumerated. Education was the instrument by which Alfred hoped to conquer his own subjects, as by arms he had conquered their enemies; but education was confined entirely to the Church, and as a necessary consequence of the ravages of the Danes, the monasteries, which were the seats of learning, had been destroyed, the libraries they contained had been reduced to ashes, and the trembling monks expelled from their habitations, or ruthlessly put to death. Books also at this time, being for the most part written in Latin^a, became useless, when those who alone could read them, were either slain or exiled: and the Services of the Church, which were also performed in Latin, became an unmeaning form, or were intermitted altogether.

These circumstances did not discourage the king; it was not his intention to stand aloof and point out to his subjects the rugged road which they were to take:

^a Books in the Anglo-Saxon tongue were probably rare at this time.

but to travel with them, and to share all its toils, nay to take upon him more than an equal share of the labour that must be borne. It is a wonderful fact, that the king outstripped all his subjects in every branch of human knowledge which was then cultivated, and no sooner perceived that there remained something to be acquired, than he started foremost in the race, and far outstripped every competitor. In what manner he, by his own example, which would naturally be more powerful than all his precepts, advanced the cause of Religion, we may learn from the faithful narrative of Asser.

“ The king was in the habit of hearing the divine Scriptures read by his own countrymen, or, if by any chance it so happened, in company with foreigners, and he attended to the reading with sedulity and solicitude. His bishops too, and all his ecclesiastics, earls and barons, ministers and friends, were loved by him with wonderful affection, and their sons, who were bred up in the royal household, were no less dear to him than his own; he had them instructed in all kinds of good morals, and among other things, never ceased to teach them letters, night and day; but, as if he had no consolation in all these things, and suffered no other annoyance either from within or without, yet he was harassed by daily and nightly affliction, so that he complained to God, and to all who were admitted to his familiar love, that Almighty God had made him ignorant of Divine wisdom, and of the liberal arts; in this he emulated the pious, wise, and wealthy Solomon, king of the Hebrews, who, at first, despising all present

* This expression occurs so often in Asser, as may be seen in the passages quoted from him, that it seems to have no more than an augmentative signification, and must not be taken literally.

glory and riches, asked wisdom of God, and found both, namely, wisdom and worldly glory; as it is written, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' But God, Who always looks into the most inward thoughts of the mind, Who is the instigator of all good intentions, and a plentiful aider to the formation of good desires—for He would not instigate a man to good intentions, unless He also amply supplied that which the man justly and properly wishes to have—instigated the king's mind within; as it is written, 'I will hearken unto what the Lord God shall say concerning me.'"

As a means of promoting a spirit of piety among his subjects, and to make them better acquainted with that which the king in his own person valued so highly, he applied himself to remedy the destruction of the monasteries, and to build others in which, like candlesticks, he might place the brilliant literary lights which he had received from abroad. We proceed to describe, in the language of Asser, the first measures which he took in this behalf.

"Of his fixed purpose of holy meditation, which, in the midst of prosperity and adversity, he never neglected, I cannot with advantage now omit to speak. For, whereas he often thought of the necessities of his soul, among the other good deeds to which his thoughts were turned night and day, he ordered that two monasteries should be built, one for monks at Athelney, which is a place surrounded by impassable marshes and rivers, where no one can enter but by boats, or by a bridge laboriously constructed between two other heights; at the western end of which bridge was erected a strong tower, of beautiful work, by the king's command, and in this monastery he collected monks

of all kinds, from every quarter, and placed them therein.

“ At first, because he had no one of his own nation, noble and free by birth, who was willing to enter the monastic life, except children, who could neither choose good nor avoid evil in consequence of their tender age, because for many previous years the love of a monastic life had utterly decayed from that nation, as well as from many other nations, though many monasteries still remain in that country; yet, as no one directed the rule of that kind of life in a regular way,—for what reason, I cannot say,—either from the invasions of foreigners which took place so frequently both by sea and land, or because that people abounded in riches of every kind, and so looked with contempt on the monastic life: it was for this reason, that King Alfred sought to gather monks of different kinds, to place in the same monastery.

“ First, he placed there as abbat, John the priest and monk, an old Saxon by birth; and besides him certain priests and deacons from beyond the sea; of whom, finding that he had not so large a number as he wished, he procured as many as possible of the same Gallic race, some of whom, being children, he ordered to be taught in the same monastery, and at a later period to be admitted to the monastic habit. I have myself seen a young lad, of pagan birth, who was educated in that monastery, and he was by no means behindhand with any of them.

“ There was also a deed once done in that monastery, which I would utterly consign to oblivion, although it is an unworthy deed; for, throughout the whole of Scripture, the base deeds of the wicked are interspersed among the blessed deeds of the just, as tares and

darnel are sown among the wheat: good deeds are recorded, that they may be praised and imitated, and that their imitators may be held in all honour; wicked deeds are there related, that they may be censured and avoided, and their imitators be reproved with all odium, contempt, and vengeance.

“ Once upon a time, a certain priest and a deacon, Gauls by birth, and two of the monks of the aforesaid monastery, by the instigation of the devil, and excited by some secret jealousy, became so embittered in secret against their abbat, the above-mentioned John, that like Jews* they circumvented and betrayed their master. For, whereas he had two servants, whom he had hired out of Gaul, they taught these such wicked practices, that in the night, when all men were enjoying the sweet tranquillity of sleep, they should make their way into the church armed, and shutting it behind them as usual, hide themselves therein, and wait for the moment, when the abbat should enter the church alone. At length, when he should come alone to pray, and, bending his knees, bow before the holy altar, the men should rush on him with fury, and endeavour to slay him on the spot. They were then to drag his lifeless body out of the church, and throw it down before the house of a certain harlot, as if he had been slain whilst on a visit to her. This was their machination, whereby they added crime to crime, as it is said, ‘ The last error shall be worse than the first.’

“ But the Divine mercy, which always delights to aid the innocent, frustrated in great part the wicked designs of these wicked men, so that it should not turn out in every respect as they had proposed.

“ When, therefore, the whole of the evil counsel

* Or, “ like Judas,” “ Judaico more.”

had been explained by those wicked teachers to their wicked agents, and the night which had been fixed on for the deed was come, the two armed ruffians were placed, with a promise of impunity, to wait in the church for the arrival of the abbat. In the middle of the night, John, as usual, entered the church to pray, without any one's knowing of it, and knelt before the altar. The two ruffians rushed upon him with drawn swords, and dealt him some severe wounds: but he, being a man of a brave mind, and, as we have heard say, not unacquainted with the art of self-defence, if he had not been a follower of a better calling, no sooner heard the sound of the robbers, before he saw them, than he rose up against them before he was wounded, and, shouting as loud as he could, struggled against them, crying out that they were devils and not men; for he himself knew no better, as he thought that no men would dare to attempt such a deed. He was, however, wounded before any of his people could come to his help. His attendants, roused by the noise, were frightened when they heard the word devils, and both those two, who like Jews sought to betray their master, and the others who knew nothing of the matter, rushed together to the doors of the church; but, before they got there, those ruffians escaped, leaving the abbat half dead. The monks raised the old man, in a fainting condition, and carried him home with tears and lamentations; nor did those two deceitful monks shed tears less than the innocent. But God's mercy did not allow so bold a deed to pass unpunished; the ruffians who perpetrated it, and all who urged them to it, were taken and put in prison, where, by various tortures, they came to a disgraceful end.

“Another monastery, also, was built by the king as a residence for nuns, near the eastern gate of Shaftesbury; and his own daughter, Ethelgiva, was placed in it as abbess. With her many other noble ladies, bound by the rules of the monastic life, dwelt in that monastery. These two edifices were enriched by the king with much land, as well as personal property.

“These things being thus disposed of, the king began, as was his practice, to consider within himself, what more he could do to augment and shew forth his piety; what he had begun wisely, and thoughtfully conceived for the public benefit, was adhered to with equally beneficial results; for he had heard it out of the book of the law, that the Lord had promised to render to him ten-fold; and he knew that the Lord had kept his promise, and had actually restored to him ten-fold. Encouraged by this example, and wishing to exceed the practices of his predecessors, he humbly and faithfully vowed to devote to God half of his service, both day and night, and also half of all his wealth, such as should every year lawfully and justly come into his possession; and this vow, as far as human discretion can perceive and keep, he skilfully and wisely endeavoured to fulfil. But, that he might, with his usual caution, avoid that which Scripture warns us against; ‘If you offer aright, but do not divide aright, you sin,’ he considered how he might divide aright that which he had vowed to God; and, as Solomon had said, ‘The heart of the king is in the hand of God,’ that is, his counsel, he ordered with wise policy, which could come only from above, that his officers should first divide into two parts the revenues of every year.”

Besides the monasteries of Athelney and Shaftesbury, of which Asser has left us these interesting details, it appears that Alfred built another religious house at Winchester, called the "New Minster". Though we find nothing about its foundation in the earlier Chronicles, yet, as Winchester was the principal city of Wessex, and the place where the king held his court, it may be supposed that no pains or expense were spared to construct it with becoming magnificence. As the foundation of this monastery was only commenced a short time before the death of Alfred, it is described by the historian William of Malmesbury, as having been designed rather than built by this king. It was placed so near the Cathedral or Old Minster of Winchester, that the services which were chaunted in the choir of the one, could be easily heard by the singing-men who were officiating in the other; and King Edward is said to have paid a mark of gold to the bishop for every foot of land that he purchased, in order to have sufficient ground for the offices and out-buildings of the monastery. The inconveniences of this great proximity were soon felt by the inhabitants of both those religious houses, and before the time of Malmesbury the building was destroyed, and the materials removed to the outside of the city, where was built the

"The annals of Winchelcomb [in Bibl. Cotton] and Roger Hoveden [fol. 281, 6. n. 50.] say that his wife Ælswith was foundress: and so Leland also, [Collect. vol. i. p. 337.] only with this addition, that neither Ælfred nor Ælswith could finish it before their death." HEARNE, pag. 167, note 3. "In one of Sir Ken. Digby's MSS. [num. 11. f. 157. a.] it is positively said he [Alfred] founded this monastery, and endowed it with large revenues." Id. p. 168. note 1.

"Ad hujus monasterii officinas instituendas." CAMDEN'S Annales. "Ad unumquemque pedem marcam auri publico pondere pensitavit." Malmes. de gest. pontif. lib. ii.

abbey of Hyde, of which King Alfred has, in consequence, often been described as the founder*.

It has been often vaguely stated by different writers, that Alfred was not only a benefactor to monasteries in general, but also built many new ones: those however which we have mentioned are the only ones which can, on good and positive authority, be ascribed to him, though he in a variety of ways made large and valuable gifts to various other religious houses. For instance, the Cathedral Church of Sherborne still possessed, in Malmesbury's time, some jewels that were brought to Alfred from the East Indies; and he is registered as the first of the benefactors to the Church of Wilton†. The abbey of Glastonbury seems also to have been much benefitted by this king; for Henry II, in a charter of confirmation to that Church, enumerates the charters of Alfred among those of other kings his predecessors‡. There is also still extant a charter dated 889, and granted by Alfred to the Church of Worcester, the occasion of which was as follows: "Alhune, bishop of Worcester, had bought of Burrhed, king of Mercia, and of Ceolmund, præfect of London, a certain portion of

* It is so stated in a Table of Collection of Monasteries, (with the Dedication, founders, and values of them,) commonly ascribed to Speed: but the author of this work was Burton, the Leicestershire antiquary, as appears from Sir Henry Spelman's Councils, tom. 21. p. 215. and Tauner's preface to his *Notitia Monastica*.

† "First built by St. Alburg, sister to King Egbert, for one abbess and twelve nuns; but King Alfred increased them to twenty-six, being excited to this piece of piety after his defeat of the Danes at Waschesorne, near Wilton, [Leland's Coll. vol. ii. p. 195.] though Mr. Hen. Crompe has assigned another reason. See *Mon. Ang.* tom. ii. p. 857." HEARNE. p. 170.

‡ See *Matt. Paris*, p. 21. who calls Ælfred and Edward the Confessor the founders of it.

• In *Kemble's Codex diplomaticus Anglo-Saxonicus*, vol. ii. p. 118.

the customs of the port there, with the liberty of using a certain bushel with the weights and measures belonging. Alfred afterwards coming to be the lord of the city, granted freely to the Church of Worcester a certain space of ground extending from the great street (which then was next to the wharf) unto the walls of the city, and contained twenty-six perches in length, and thirteen perches and seven feet in breadth, free and discharged of all public duties, together with the liberties of a bushel and scales within that precinct, and all forfeitures and duties thereof coming, to the benefit of the Church of Worcester^b."

These gifts to the monastic houses flowed, no doubt, from the intense love of mental culture which manifests itself throughout all Alfred's life: and from the same motive he gathered round him at his own court the sons of his nobility to receive, in conjunction with his own children, a better education than their parents would be able or willing to give them in their own households. To this assemblage of pupils Asser has attached the name of school, and a violent controversy once distracted the literary world concerning the sense in which the word was to be understood, and whether it was not the beginning or origin of a learned institution still existing. In speaking of this subject, Asser has taken occasion to enumerate and describe the children who were born to Alfred from his wife Elswitha, daughter of Ethelred the "Big," alderman of the Gaini, and a noble of great wealth and influence in Mercia.

"The sons and daughters," says Asser, "which he had by his wife above mentioned, were Ethelfled the eldest, after whom came Edward, then Ethelgiva, then Ethelswitha, and Ethelwerd, besides those who died

^b Spelman, p. 170.

in their infancy, one of whom was Edmund. Ethelfled, when she arrived at a marriageable age, was united to Ethelred^c, earl of Mercia; Ethelgiva was dedicated to God, and submitted to the rules of a monastic life; Ethelwerd, the youngest, by the Divine counsels and admirable prudence of the king, was consigned to the schools of learning, where, with the children of almost all the nobility of the country, and many also who were not noble, he prospered under the diligent care of his teachers. Books in both languages, namely, in Latin and Saxon, were read in the school. They also learned to write; so that, before they were of an age to practise manly arts, namely hunting and such other pursuits as befit noblemen, they became studious and clever in the liberal arts. Edward and Ethelwitha were bred up in the king's court, and received great attention from their servants and nurses; nay, they continue to this day^d, with the love of all about them, and shew affability, and even gentleness, towards all, both foreigners and natives, and are in complete subjection to their father; nor, among their other studies which appertain to this life and are fit for noble youths, are they suffered to pass their time idly and unprofitably, without learning the liberal arts; for they have carefully learned the Psalms and Saxon books, especially the Saxon Poems, and are continually in the habit of making use of books^e." The schools of learning, to which Asser alludes in this passage, as formed for the use of the king's children and the sons of his nobles, are again mentioned elsewhere by the same author, as "the school which

^c A different person from Ethelred, the Big alderman of the Gaini.

^d Asser wrote in 888, and died soon after.

^e Asser, sub an. 884.

he had studiously collected together, consisting of many of the nobility of his own nation^f:" and in a third passage^g, Asser speaks of the "sons of the nobility who were bred up in the royal household." It is clear, then, from these expressions, that the king's exertions to spread learning among his nobles and to educate his own children, were of a most active and personal nature, unconnected with any institutions of a more public character: the school was kept in his own household, and not in a public seat of learning. We may perhaps adduce these expressions of Asser as militating against the notion, that an University or Public Seminary of Learning existed in the days of Alfred. Though it is most probable that the several monasteries, and other societies of monks and churchmen, would employ a portion of their idle time in teaching youth, and prosecuting their own studies; yet there is no proof that an authorized seat of learning, such as the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, existed in England, until many hundred years after the time of Alfred. Yet an attempt was made in the sixteenth century to prove, on the one side, that Cambridge had been founded by Sigebert, king of East Anglia; and on the other, that the University of Oxford was in full operation in the time of Alfred, who himself went thither to settle one of the religious and literary controversies, which have so often disturbed its tranquillity. The account of this dispute is first found in the following passage, taken from Asser's biography.

"In the same year [886] there arose a foul and deadly discord at Oxford, between Grimbold, with those learned men whom he had brought with him,

^f Anno 888.

^g Anno 884.

and the old scholars, whom he found there, who, on his arrival, altogether refused to adopt the laws, modes, and forms of prælection instituted by the same Grimbald. During three years there had been no great dissension between them, but there was a secret enmity, which afterwards broke out with great atrocity, clearer than the light itself. To appease this quarrel, the invincible King Alfred, having been informed of the strife by a messenger from Grimbald, went to Oxford to put an end to the controversy, and took much pains to hear the arguments and complaints which were brought forwards on both sides. The substance of the dispute was this: the old scholars contended that literature had flourished at Oxford before the coming of Grimbald, though the number of scholars was smaller than in ancient times, because several of them had been driven away by the cruelty and tyranny of the pagans. They also proved and shewed, by the undoubted testimony of ancient annals, that the orders and institutions of that place had been sanctioned by certain pious and learned men, as for instance by saint Gildas, Melkinus, Nennius, Kentigern, and others, who had all grown old there in literature, and happily administered every thing there in peace and concord; and also, that Saint German had come to Oxford, and stopping there half a year, at the time when he went through Britain to preach against the Pelagian heresy, wonderfully approved of the customs and institutions above mentioned. The king, with unheard-of humility, listened to both sides carefully, and exhorted them again and again with pious and wholesome admonitions to cherish mutual love and concord. He therefore left them with this decision, that each party should follow their own

counsel, and preserve their own institutions. Grimbald, displeased at this, immediately departed to the monastery at Winchester^h, which had been recently founded by King Alfred, and ordered a tomb to be carried to Winchester, in which he proposed, after this life, that his bones should be laid in the vault that had been made under the chancel of St. Peter's church in Oxford; which church the same Grimbald had built from its foundations, of stone polished with great careⁱ."

It is unfortunate for the authenticity of this passage, that there never was known to exist more than one Manuscript in which it is found, and the narrative which it unfolds is entirely at variance with the whole tenor of King Alfred's life^j. If learning had already fixed its seat on the banks of the Isis, where would have been the necessity of sending for those foreign scholars, of whom the chroniclers have written? The king was by no means addicted to foreign manners; on the contrary, all his aims were directed to improve and set forth the talent of his own country. It is not the mark of a patriotic king to look abroad for the talents which can be found at home: and though in a state of barbarism, a monarch more enlightened than his contemporaries will industriously procure teachers

^h The new Minster, before mentioned, of which Grimbald was the first abbat.

ⁱ Asser, an. 886.

^j Dr. Lingard adduces an internal argument, which appears to me to be very just and weighty, against the authenticity of this passage. "What writer," says he, "of the ninth or tenth centuries ever used the expressions *Divus Petrus*, or *Divi Gildas*, *Melkinus*, &c.?" *Hist. of Eng.* i. p. 179.

For an account of this miserable controversy between the partizans of Oxford and Cambridge, see Wise's Asser, Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, ii. p. 155. and several other works.

from other countries, to instruct his ignorant people ; yet, where learning has already taken root, he will best elicit its fruits by a just and fair distribution of its rewards to all that may become competitors, and not by depressing the minds of his own countrymen, or by bestowing their inheritance upon strangers.

But these remarks lead us towards a train of thought, which must be acknowledged to derive no authority, except by inference, from the ancient writers ; and it is one which I should have been reluctant to promulgate, if it had not forced itself not only on my own attention, but on that of a far more able judge of the motives by which human actions are determined. Sir John Spelman^k has remarked, that when we consider the estimation in which King Alfred was held, even at Rome itself, it appears remarkable that, after his death, his memory was passed over without his receiving the honours and title of a Saint ; yet if the Church of Rome had borne the same good will towards him that they have done towards others, as, for instance, towards the obscure Edmund his contemporary, king of East-Anglia, it would not have been a hard task for them to have detected in the manifold incidents of his life, as good a ground for conferring on him canonization, as they have had for many whom the Pope and Cardinals have sainted. The very opening of Alfred's life was remarkable, though we have lost the exact particulars ; and a future Pope might have with propriety adjudged the honours which he had to bestow on Alfred, if not for the benefits which he brought to mankind, yet as a confirmation of the mysterious ceremony of unction which he had received from one of that Pope's predecessors. When, also, the king sat in the desolate

^k Page 219—221.

island, and his affairs seemed to be in a hopeless state, he was assured in a vision, as the monkish writers tell us, that he should again sit upon his throne. Even the malady with which he was bound partakes of the same wonderful character, and might be taken as a proof that Alfred was a chosen child, whom the Lord would correct with stripes in the flesh, that He might purify him for the posthumous honours of a Saint. If more was wanting to prove his aptness for such honours, it might be added, that he had exemplified in his own practice the precept of the Gospel, and had given half of his revenues to God, even whilst he still exercised the functions of a king. His whole life was one continued aspiration and struggle after what was good, impeded and kept back by the persecutions of a race of heathens, whose success would have upset the bark of St. Peter with its crew, the Pope and all his Cardinals. It seems remarkable that no notice was taken of his career, by those who were so amply benefitted by his virtues; and it cannot be superfluous to enquire why he was not canonized, in an age when this was the highest honour which the Head of Christendom could bestow.

Many indications have been left us; that the life and actions of King Alfred were not in harmony with the sentiments which have always prevailed at the Court of Rome. "The king," says Spelman, "walked with too much knowledge and understanding, and was not so easy to be led by them as his father was; and, though in spiritual matters he revered the Pope, (according to the doctrine of the times,) as universal vicar, yet he understood not the inferences that were afterwards built upon that foundation, but exercised his regal authority absolutely, for which cause they seem to have declined

striving with him, and therefore, though it had happened that all the bishoprics of West-Saxony, viz. Winchester, Cornwall, Sherborne, Wells, and Cridda, were for three whole years vacant, and only under the care of the archbishop of Canterbury until the time of the king's death, yet we hear of no offence taken therefore at Rome; but when after his death they continued as long vacant in his son Edward's time, the first news of distaste that he heard thereof was a curse and an excommunication¹."

That the tendency of the Roman court and doctrines was against the dissemination of learning in general, would be an assertion as uncharitable as it is untrue; but it would be difficult to defend the ecclesiastical system of the middle ages from a charge, not so sweeping, but based on a better foundation than the former. The Roman Court never tolerated even learning or virtue itself, if it in any way opposed their own favourite opinions. It becomes, therefore, a matter of the greatest probability, that some of the reforms and ameliorations which Alfred introduced, especially as regards the numerous translations from the Latin into the Anglo-Saxon tongue, which were made by his command, would meet with coldness, if not censure, but certainly not with approbation, from the lips of the Sovereign Pontiff. Many of these translations were, in their subjects, closely connected with the Scriptures, which the Romanists have never, but by compulsion, allowed to be communicated to the vulgar by means of versions in the vernacular tongue.

It is not unworthy of remark, that, when the king sought far and near in foreign parts for learned men to assist him in his work of advancement, the Church

¹ Spelman, p. 220. Malmesb. an. 904.

of Rome gave him no help, neither did any scholars come to him from thence, though, from the days of St. Augustine, the Apostolical City was a common source at which all its spiritually dependent states were in the habit of applying for assistance, whether in the matter of religion, learning, or worldly counsel. Yet, that Alfred maintained a connection with Rome is evident from many observations of the chroniclers, and it has been even said, that he "maintained a more regular intercourse with Rome than any of his predecessors^m." A curious instance of correspondence occurs in Asser's biography, under the year 884. "Pope Martin, of blessed memory, died this year; it was he who, in regard for Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, and at his request, freed the school of the Anglo-Saxons resident at Rome from all tribute and tax. He also sent many gifts on that occasion, and amongst others, a large piece of the holy and venerable Cross, on which our Lord Jesus Christ was suspended for the salvation of mankind." That a king of so enlightened a mind would attach little importance to the worthless bit of wood, which derived all its value from a falsehood, may be easily conceived; but the exemption from tribute for the English school was a more substantial gift, and that it was granted at the king's urgent request, is in unison with every other feature of his enlarged and thoughtful mind. "As, like Solon, he ceased from learning only when he ceased to live, so he anxiously provided for the education of his children and his subjectsⁿ," even of that part of them, who resided at the English seminary in a distant city.

The writer, who has given his sanction to this view

^m Lappenberg, vol. ii. p. 72.

ⁿ Ibid.

of Alfred's indisposition to fall in with the views of Church Government which then prevailed, has further argued, that the famous Johannes Scotus Erigena was persecuted by the Roman Court for having written something not altogether to their relish, and that, when refused protection in Germany and France, he met with countenance from Alfred, and was invited to England, where he remained till his death. But it is doubtful whether this famous scholastic writer ever came to England, and the argument founded upon it falls to the ground, or remains in abeyance until stronger confirmation can be found.

But we may here consider how far the observations which Asser has written concerning the early part of Alfred's reign may bear upon this subject. The reader will have remarked the tendency of the biographer's words: as they have before occurred to our notice[†]. "The Almighty not only granted to the same glorious king victories over his enemies, but also permitted him to be harassed by them, to be sunk down by adversities, and depressed by the low estate of his followers, *to the end that he might learn that there is one Lord of all things, to whom every knee doth bow, and in whose hand are the hearts of kings, who puts down the mighty from their seat, and exalteth the humble; who suffers his servants, when they are elevated and at the summit of prosperity, to be touched by the rod of adversity, that in their humility they may not despair of God's mercy, nor in their prosperity boast of their honours, but may also know, to whom they owe all the things which they possess.*"

If it were required to produce a passage from the contemporary writers which most favours the suppo-

[†] See page 196.

sition that Alfred's conduct was not in strict conformity with the ecclesiastical notions of his time, none could, I think, be produced of greater force than that which has just been quoted. We must not forget that Asser was an ecclesiastic long before he became the friend and minister of Alfred, and though during the whole time of their connexion, which was little more than seven years, the king's conduct was such as neither to merit nor to receive reproof from his spiritual advisers, yet, if in the beginning of his reign he had shewn a disposition not to be subservient, as kings then generally were, to the dictation of his bishops, or had even committed acts which, supposing they had the right to censure him, would have been worthy of their censure, we cannot doubt that not only Asser, but almost every person of influence, in a system like that of Rome, bound together into one body, would have soon heard, with sorrow or with anger, of so unusual and dangerous a deviation from their rule.

To reconcile these suggestions with the remarks with which Asser follows up the subject, is perhaps not a difficult task. Alfred "would not listen," continues he^a, "to the petitions which his subjects made to him for help in their necessities, or for relief from those who oppressed them; but he repulsed them from him, and paid no heed to their requests." If these petitions proceeded from the monks as well as from the laity, the neglect with which he treated them would no doubt be more likely to receive exaggeration than palliation from the greater means which these possessed, to complain of the slight which had been shewn them. This particular is said also to have "given much annoyance to the

^a See page 197.

holy man St. Neot, who was his relation, and often foretold to him, in the spirit of prophecy, that he would suffer great adversity on this account; but Alfred neither attended to the reproof of the man of God, nor listened to his true prediction." To those, who make allowances for the difference of times and manners, and can coolly view the whole system of canonization, practised in those times, as being the only mode of setting an outward stamp or impress upon virtues of the highest kind, it may furnish a somewhat satirical lesson on the perverseness of human things, that the puny name of a Neot should have been inflated by honours which hand him down to us as a sacred person, whilst the greatest intellect that ever filled the royal diadem, should appear in the light of a wayward child neglecting the warnings of his instructor. If Alfred erred at first in setting himself in opposition to a system which was too powerful even for him, he was sharp-sighted enough to perceive his mistake; he bowed before that which could not be resisted, and, gathering from every side such aids as presented themselves, proceeded on that lofty flight which carried him beyond all that went before him, to the wonder and admiration of all who were to follow.

Let us now return from these reflections which have flowed, not from the authority of eye-witnesses, but from a wish to trace the principles of action which influenced so noble a mind, and proceed to collect what still remains to be said of Alfred from the narrative of him who saw him with his own eyes, conversed with him in the midst of his glory, and has, though with a weak pen and in an imperfect style, recorded the most striking anecdotes of his life.

CHAP. XXII.

ALFRED'S AVOCATIONS AS DESCRIBED BY ASSER REVIEWED—HUNTING AND FALCONRY—WORKING IN GOLD AND SILVER—ARCHITECTURE—SERVICES OF RELIGION AND PRIVATE DEVOTION—DEVOTES HALF HIS TIME TO GOD—HE MAKES WAX LIGHTS TO MEASURE TIME—INVENTS LANTERNS—HIS LOVE OF BOOKS—ALL LEARNING CONFINED TO THE LATIN TONGUE—ALFRED LEARNS LATIN—HIS LITERARY WORKS—HIS ENCHIRIDION OR MANUAL—PREFACE TO GREGORY'S PASTORAL CARE—TRANSLATION OF BOETHIUS—TRANSLATION OF OROSIUS, &c.—VOYAGES OF OTHTER AND WULFSTAN—ALFRED'S FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE.

THE avocations which now occupied the king's thoughts, were sufficiently numerous and weighty to furnish him full employment, and to fill up all his time. They are gravely and seriously enumerated by Asser, though the grouping may excite a smile in modern readers.

“In the mean time,” says the biographer, “the king, during the frequent wars and other trammels of this present life, the invasions of the Pagans, and his own daily infirmities of body, continued to carry on the government, and to exercise hunting in all its branches; to teach his workers in gold and artificers of all kinds, his falconers, hawkers, and dog-keepers, to build houses, majestic and good, beyond all the precedents of his ancestors, by his new mechanical

inventions; to recite the Saxon books, and more especially to learn by heart the Saxon poems, and to make others learn them also: for he alone never desisted from studying, most diligently, to the best of his ability; he attended the mass and other daily services of religion: he was frequent in psalm-singing and prayer, at the proper hours, both of the night and of the day. He also went to the churches, as we have already said, in the night-time to pray, secretly and unknown to his courtiers; he bestowed alms and largesses both on his own people, and on foreigners of all countries; he was affable and pleasant to all, and curious to investigate things unknown."

We may derive much instruction from a more minute investigation of the pursuits which are enumerated in this list, as engaging the attention of so great and good a king. They may be reduced under the following heads. 1. Hunting and Falconry. 2. The art of working in gold and silver. 3. Architecture. 4. Public Services of Religion. 5. Private Devotion. 6. Literature. 7. Liberality to the poor and to foreigners. Besides, lastly, the occupation which belongs principally to a king, the administration of the government, and the equal distribution of justice among his subjects. On some of these points all that has come down to us has already been placed before the reader, but it will be proper to review them all once more in order.

1. The biographer places, next to the government of the country, the arts of hunting and falconry, among the laborious pursuits of Alfred. The Saxons brought with them, out of Germany, a strong liking for the pleasures and dangers of the chase: hunting was held to be a necessary part of a liberal education: it enured the Saxon youth to hardihood, made them

active, patient of toil, and prompt to extricate themselves from the dangers into which a headlong pursuit after the wild beasts of the forest might lead them. The king had been bred up from his boyhood to this exercise, and continued to practise it, and to encourage it among his subjects, as a means of raising their manly courage, whilst it added to the state and magnificence of his own court.

It may be added, that the breed of English dogs has been remarkable from the days of Nemesian and Oppian^a: and was not likely to have escaped the attention of the observant king. The extensive marshes also, and the inundations which so frequently deluged the plains on the banks of the English rivers, furnished great temptations and facilities for the successful prosecution of falconry.

2. The art of working in gold and silver was a favourite subject for the king's taste and patronage. A beautiful specimen of workmanship occurs in his Jewel, which has already been mentioned; and if we are to understand literally his biographer's assertion, that the king himself taught the artist to execute such works as this, it considerably augments our respect for the master-mind, which not only entered upon so many different callings, but succeeded so completely in them all. The working in gold and silver must however be interpreted to comprehend a vast extent of art and science. The mere manufacture of a bracelet, or any other ornament of the person, will hardly describe the full operation of this art: the inlaying and setting of precious stones, enamelling in all its branches, and the decorative branches of carving and gilding, may all be included in the name, and the introduction or improvement of these

^a Nemes. v. 124. Oppian. 470.

elegant embellishments to the residences of the king and his nobles must have not only improved the taste, but have added to the comforts, of his countrymen*.

3. Of the architectural studies of Alfred we have already had occasion to speak^b. They formed an important branch, for on the situation and construction of towns and cities depends much of the success of commerce: on the adaptation of fortresses to the general defence of the kingdom, must partly depend its safety from foreign enemies, and with the style and usefulness of the

* In connection with Alfred's works in gold and silver, Spelman hazards a conjecture which, I fear, has only the imagination of its author for its support: "I know not," says he, "why we may not conjecture, that the king (being by the return of his East-Indian ship [see *hereafter*] stored with many eastern stones, and by his especial industry upon that occasion provided also of workmen) probably fell upon the composing of an imperial crown, which, though not of the form, that by way of distinction we at this day call imperial, yet was it of a more august and imperial form than had been formerly of use in this kingdom. For in the arched room in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, where the ancient regalia of this kingdom are kept, upon a box, (which is the cabinet to the ancientest crown,) there is (as I am informed) an inscription to this purpose: *Hæc est principalior corona cum qua coronabantur reges Ælfredus, Edwardus, &c.* And the crown (which to this purpose were worth the observing) is of a very ancient work, with flowers adorned with stones of somewhat a plain setting. This by the inscription appearing to have been the crown of Ælfred, and his successors, is to be supposed to have been made by him, and that when he was become universal king of the Heptarchy. In which respect, and for the value of the jewels, (then and long after very rare in these parts,) as also for the venerable esteem which (for the original and author) succeeding ages have ever had of it, it seems deservedly to be accounted the most principal crown." p. 200. Hearne remarks, that the coins of Alfred do not represent that king's head as encircled with a crown, but simply with a diadem. Edward the Confessor is the first English king, on whose coins a crown occurs.

^b See page 286.

buildings where the king himself was to reside, and the great officers of State were to discharge their duties, would be connected, in a great measure, the dignity and credit of the government.

4. and 5. Of the king's regard for the public services of Religion and of his own private devotions, sufficient has been said before to shew that he was not deficient in either of these particulars. His division of his revenues into two parts has been already stated. In the same way he attempted to divide his own time, and to devote half of it to the service of his Creator. The account of this may be best told in the words of Asser.

“ When the king had arranged these matters, he remembered that sentence of divine Scripture, ‘ Who-soever will give alms, ought to begin from himself;’ and he prudently began to consider what he could offer to God from the service of his own body and mind; for he proposed to consecrate to God no less out of this, than he had done of things external to himself. Moreover, he promised, as far as his infirmity and his means would allow, to give up to God the half of his service, bodily and mental, by night and by day, voluntarily, and to the best of his power; but, inasmuch as he could not equally distinguish the length of the hours by night, on account of the darkness, and oft-times during the day, on account of the storms and clouds^c, he began to consider, by what means, relying on the mercy of God, he might, without impediment, as long as he lived, discharge the promised tenour of his vow.

“ After long reflection on these things, he at length, by an useful and shrewd invention, commanded his chaplains to provide wax in a sufficient quantity; and he caused it to be weighed in such a manner, that

^c Does not this prove that sun-dials were then in use?

when there was so much of it in the scale as would equal the weight of seventy-two pence, he caused his chaplains to make six candles out of it, each of equal length, so that each candle might have twelve divisions marked longitudinally upon it. By this plan, therefore, those six candles burned for twenty-four hours, a night and a day, exactly, before the sacred relics of many of God's elect, which always accompanied him wherever he went: but sometimes, when they would not continue burning a whole day and night, till the same hour that they were lighted the preceding evening, owing to the violence of the wind, which blew day and night without intermission through the doors and windows of the churches, the fissures of the partitions, the plankings, or of the wall, and the thin canvass of the tents, they then unavoidably burnt out and finished their course before the appointed time; the king therefore considered by what means he could shut out the wind, and so, by an useful and cunning invention, he ordered a lantern to be beautifully constructed of wood and white ox-horn, which, when skilfully planed till it is thin, is no less transparent than a vessel of glass. This lantern, therefore, was wonderfully made of wood and horn, as we before said, and by night a candle was put into it, which shone as brightly without as within, and was not extinguished by the wind; for the opening of the lantern was also closed up, according to the king's command, by a door made of horn. By this contrivance, then, six candles, lighted in succession, lasted four and twenty hours, neither more nor less, and when these were extinguished, others were lighted in their places.

“ When these things were properly arranged, the

king, eager to give up to God the half of his daily service, as he had vowed, and more also, if his ability on the one hand, and his malady on the other, would allow him, shewed himself a minute investigator of the truth in all his judgments, and this especially for the sake of the poor, to whose interest, day and night, among other duties of this life, he ever was wonderfully attentive. For in the whole kingdom the poor had few or no protectors besides him; all the powerful and the noble of that country had turned their thoughts rather to worldly than to heavenly things; each was more bent on secular matters to his own profit, than on the public good."

6. We pass to the sixth division of Alfred's labours; and in this department he did so much, that what he has left behind him, if it had been the sole fruits of his life, would shew that he had not spent his life in vain. The occupations, which we have already described, humble as some of them may be thought to form the serious pursuits of a king, were of the utmost importance in the great march of his country towards civilization, and they put to shame the vain and useless fancies to which the time of kings is sometimes devoted. But the scheme, which Alfred had devised for the improvement of his people, comprehended another and higher element, without which all that he had accomplished would be continually liable to retrograde and decay. The knowledge of one age may be delivered to the next by personal communication between the master and the pupil, the father and his son; but this process of oral delivery will very soon reach its limit. The progress of the human intellect in discovery will outstrip its ability to retain; and as new inventions are introduced, old ones will

disappear: it is only by means of some external contrivance to retain the past, that man can hope to improve his condition in the future. This valuable aid to the memory is to be derived from books alone, and the way to make a right use of books is to be found in that which we call Literature. All this was known, almost by intuition, to Alfred, or at least by that wonderful peculiarity of character, which turned him not to those studies that would have degraded him to a level with the worst of his species, but to such as raised him above all competitors, and made him the benefactor and the admiration of mankind.

When we consider that Alfred had reached his twelfth year, before he could even read, it appears surprising that he should ever have become a follower of literature at all. Yet the love of book-learning was so deeply rooted in the mind of Alfred, that it could not be eradicated, even by the violence of the scenes in which so many years of his intermediate life were passed. We may conceive the delight with which the king, in 880, at last relieved from his persevering enemies the Danes, hailed the opportunity, which peace would bring, for indulging in study, and encouraging his people by his example to do the same. But the vernacular literature of the Anglo-Saxons, consisting principally of poems or ballads, was the only portion of learning which as yet was open to the king. He began to learn to read at the age of twelve, but his attempts were still for many years confined to a very narrow field of operations. The main part of learning was contained in the foreign idiom of the Latin tongue, and even the ecclesiastics, in Alfred's time, had almost entirely forgotten the language in which they were

required to perform all their services, and where all their knowledge was to be gathered.

In 887 Alfred was thirty-eight years old, and in that year, if we rightly understand the language of his biographer, he began to read the Latin language, and to apply it to the interpretation of the Scriptures. The story is prettily related by Asser, and must be told in his own words.

“ In the same year also, Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, began, by Divine inspiration, on one and the same day, to read and to interpret; but that I may explain this more fully to those who are ignorant, I will relate the cause of this long delay in beginning.

“ On a certain day we were both of us sitting in the king's chamber, talking on all kinds of subjects, as usual, and it happened that I read to him a quotation out of a certain book. He listened to it with the utmost attention, and addressed me with a thoughtful mind, shewing me at the same moment a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein the daily courses, and psalms, and prayers, which he had read in his youth, were written, and he commanded me to write the same quotation in that book. Hearing this, and perceiving his ingenuous benevolence, and devout desire of studying the words of Divine Wisdom, I gave, though in secret, boundless thanks to Almighty God, who had implanted such a love of wisdom in the king's heart. But I could not find any empty space in that book, wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters; wherefore I made a little delay, principally that I might stir up the mind of the king to a higher acquaintance with the Divine testimonies. Upon his urging me to make haste and write it quickly, I said to him, ‘ Are you willing that I should write that

quotation upon some leaf apart? For it is not certain whether we shall not find one or more other such extracts which will please you; and if that should so happen, we shall be glad that we have kept them apart.' 'Your plan is good,' said he; and I gladly made haste to get ready a sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me; and on that same day I wrote therein, as I had anticipated, no less than three other quotations which pleased him; and from that time we daily talked together, and found out other quotations which equally pleased him, so that the sheet became full, and deservedly so; according as it is written. 'The just man builds upon a moderate foundation, and gradually passes to greater things.' Thus, like a productive bee, he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many various flowers of the divine Scriptures, with which he thickly stored the cells of his mind.

"Now, when that first quotation was copied, he was eager at once to read and to interpret in Saxon, and then to teach others; even as we read of that happy robber, who recognised his Lord, yea the Lord of all mankind, as he was hanging on the blessed cross, and, saluting him with his bodily eyes only, because elsewhere he was pierced all over with nails, cried 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom;' for it was only at the end of his life that he began to learn the rudiments of the Christian faith.

"It was on the sacred solemnity of Saint Martin, [Nov. 11.] that the king, inspired by God, began to study the rudiments of divine Scripture, and he continued to learn the flowers collected by certain masters, and to reduce them into the form of one book, to the best of his ability, though they were mixed one with another, until the book became almost as large as a

psalter. This book he called his *ENCHEIRIDION*, *HANDBOOK*, or *MANUAL*, because he carefully kept it at hand, day and night, and found, as he told me, no small consolation therein."

The acquirement of the Latin tongue, however, was an instrument in the king's hands for a more extensive purpose than to enable himself to read the Scriptures in that tongue. It has, indeed, been the policy of the Western Church, to attach the highest importance to the study of Latin, and to exalt that version of the Scriptures, which they have adopted as their own text-book. But even Alfred^f was not ignorant that a Latin version of the Scriptures has no advantage over one in the vernacular tongue, but is rather of less value; for as it may in its first construction have failed to express accurately the ideas of the original, so is it also liable to fail of conveying to the reader, who studies it as a foreign language, a correct apprehension even of those ideas which it renders faithfully from the original.

Let us then proceed to consider the uses to which Alfred put this new literary acquisition, which it must assuredly have cost him much toil to gain. And this subject brings us to take a nearer view of the colossal dimensions which the character of Alfred displays. The brief chronicles of that period have related his actions in war with sufficient accuracy of date and detail, and if we were guided by their descriptions alone, we should perceive little to attract that notice, which in every age has been fixed on his deeds. The legends of the Church have essayed to attach a miraculous character to certain portions of his life; but the age of miracles was passed when Alfred reigned, and the king did his best that the age of reason might begin. But there is another species of testimony to

^f See his preface to Gregory's Pastoral Care.

his merits, which after a thousand years is now more highly prized than it was perhaps in his own day: these are the literary works of Alfred himself, the emanations of his own mind, speaking, not in the frigid sounds of a language that had long been numbered with the dead, but in the language which "all Saxons knew," which the meanest peasant could understand, in that tongue, which, though crushed and stifled by Dunstan, by Lanfranc, Anselm, and other foreign ecclesiastics, preserved its powers of life under all the oppression which it suffered, and at length overpowering its antagonist, broke out again into existence, and has become that language which we now use; improved, it is true, by additions from many sources, but still bearing traces of its original condition in the time of Alfred.

It may be observed of the Works of Alfred, that they are all written in the Anglo-Saxon language, and, with the exception of a few pages only, are translations from the Latin. The ancient writer Ethelwerd says, that he translated many books from Latin into Saxon, but no one could tell their number; and William of Malmesbury says, that he transferred into the English tongue almost the whole of Roman literature. What a sublime idea does this give us of a king endeavouring to raise his people together with him out of the depths of barbarism! "a king, though in nation, age, and education, almost a barbarian himself, yet not merely calmly planning to raise his people from their ignorance, but amid anxiety, business, and disease, sitting down himself to level the obstacles by his own personal labour, and to lead them by his own practice, to the improvements which he wished!"

* Turner, vol. ii. p. 21.

The first Latin work that arrested the attention of Alfred, was the "Pastoral Care" of Pope Gregory, which for a long time was much esteemed by all the Western Church. The precepts which it delivers for the better fulfilment of the episcopal duties, were thought likely to be of use in instructing the ignorant minds of Alfred's bishops and clergy; and though the miracles ascribed to religious men in Italy formed the principal part of its contents, yet it might still be of service, when no better could be procured. The translation of this book was entrusted to Bishop Werefrith, one of the ecclesiastics whom Alfred had invited to his Court, but the Preface was written by Alfred himself: it is addressed in the form of a letter to Wulfsig, and is a noble specimen of plain and simple thoughts, coming from the anxious breast of a patriot king, and endeavouring to find their way to the hearts of his people^b.

Another book which was much valued throughout Europe in the time of Alfred, was the work of Boethius on the Consolations of Philosophy. Its writer, like Alfred, had been suddenly transferred from prosperity and success to abasement and misfortune. In the prison, to which the capricious tyranny of Theodoric, king of the Goths, consigned him, he possibly drew that consolation from Philosophy which he has embodied in the precepts of his delightful little treatise. Alfred, aware perhaps of the sudden vicissitudes and early deathⁱ of the author, included the volume on the

^b See this Preface with a translation in the Appendix. The Cotton MS. [Tib. B. 11.] of the Pastoral Care is supposed to have belonged to Plegmund, archbishop of Canterbury, in Alfred's reign. There is also another early MS. of it in the Bodleian, Hatton, 88.

ⁱ Boethius was put to death in A. D. 524.

Consolation of Philosophy among the works which might instruct his own subjects. The object of the treatise is to shew the vanity of riches, power, dignity, and pleasure, and their inability to confer happiness on their possessor. The construction of the work is singular, being partly in prose and partly in verse. There can be no doubt that the Anglo-Saxon translation of it is due to King Alfred: Ethelwerd, Malmesbury, and others, attest the fact, and the Saxon preface which is prefixed to the work states that "Alfred king was the translator of this book, and from book-Latin turned it into English, as it is now done." Two Manuscripts of this work still exist, supposed to have been written soon after, if not during the reign of Alfred, from a collation of which the work has been printed within the last few years, accompanied with an English translation. In one of these Manuscripts^k the metrical part of the original is rendered into Saxon prose; in the other^l the verses are translated in Anglo-Saxon metre.

In rendering this interesting moral treatise accessible to his own subjects, Alfred has by no means shewn himself as a mere translator or copyist. His version is rather a paraphrase than a translation, and in many parts, where the king's feelings seem to have been more particularly in harmony with his subject, whole sentences are introduced into the work not to be found in the Latin original of Boethius^m.

^k A MS. in the Bodleian library. See Wanley's Catal. p. 64, 85.

^l The Cotton MS. Otho A. 6. now burnt.

^m As a minute criticism of Alfred's literary works would of itself form a good-sized volume, I have declined to do more than make a few general observations on each of them. The two principal works of Alfred having been printed, may be read both in the Saxon original and in the English translation which accompanies them. Some interesting remarks on these translations, accompanied with extracts

The next work which claims our notice is Alfred's translation of Orosius, and is of considerably greater value than either of the preceding. In executing this work, the king has allowed himself even greater latitude than in his version of Boethius. Some parts of the original he has amplified; others he has compressed; and others again he has omitted altogether. To compensate, however, for these omissions, he has inserted several new chapters altogether, two of which have attracted considerable notice: they contain a description of the principal tribes of Germany in his own time, and an account of the voyages of Oththere towards the North, and of Wulfstan to the Baltic, which were achieved in Alfred's own time, and possibly by his command. These and other minor insertions amount to several pages, and shew that Alfred took pleasure in the study of Geography, of which also they shew that he possessed a surprising knowledge, if we consider the darkness of the age in which he lived, and the distraction occasioned to his mind by the number and variety of his studiesⁿ.

The fourth work of Alfred, and perhaps the most useful of all to his subjects, was a translation of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation. This was an inestimable gift to those of his countrymen who could read it, as it invested that great national work with what alone it wanted, namely, that it should be written in the language of the country of whose early annals it treated. The translation was executed on

of the most striking passages, have appeared in Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, vol. ii. p. 1-160.

ⁿ The translation of Orosius is found in a Cotton MS. Tiber. B. i. which is very ancient, and well-written. It was published in 1773, 8vo. by Daines Barrington.

the same principles which guided the king in his other works, and is of great use as a commentary on the original text of Bede. There are several Manuscriptsⁿ of it in existence, and the work has been twice printed, both times as an accompaniment to the Latin original^o.

Besides these great works, a variety of shorter writings and tracts have been ascribed to King Alfred. Some of these have perished by time: others are still preserved in our public libraries, and have perhaps not yet received that minute attention which they demand.

William of Malmesbury says, that Alfred began to translate the Psalms of David^p, but died before it was finished.

Florence of Worcester also tells us, that Alfred translated the Bible or Testament into Anglo-Saxon, but this statement has met with no confirmation; and we may doubt whether Alfred's labours in this way extended further than to the compilation of his *Enchiridion*, *Hand-book*, or *Manual*^q, of which Asser speaks in the passage we have before quoted.

ⁿ Two at Cambridge, and one in the Cotton library.

^o First by Wheloc, and afterwards by Smith, folio, Cambridge, 1722.

^p "Published," says Hearne, [p. 212. note 2.] "by our author, Sir John Spelman, at London, 1640, 4to. from four MSS." But how could a translation be published, which was never finished? There are many Anglo-Saxon Psalters in our public libraries, see Wanley's Catalogue: all of them are anonymous, and it is impossible to say whether Alfred is the author of either of them.

^q "Flor. Wig. says, that in 887, on the feast of St. Martin, he began it. It is clear, on comparing the passages, that he only meant what Asser had mentioned, p. 57, that he then began to translate some parts. The History of Ely asserts that he translated all the Bible; but Boston of Bury says, that it was almost all the Testament." TURNER, ii. p. 95. "Whether Alfred really translated the whole

There is an Anglo-Saxon Manuscript in the Cottonian Library¹, containing some Flowers or Extracts gathered out of St. Augustine's Soliloquies. At the end of these Flowers is a sentence left imperfect by the abrupt termination of the MS². "Here end the sayings that King Alfred selected from those books that we call ———."

In the Harleian Library also is a collection of Fables in Anglo-Norman verse. The authoress of this work was Marie³, who lived in the thirteenth century. She says, at the end of the work, that Alfred had translated them from the Latin into English, i. e. Anglo-Saxon, from which she had turned them into French verse. Nothing more is known of the Fables which are thus ascribed to the king.

It appears from a catalogue of the Christ Church

Bible is somewhat to be doubted, notwithstanding what is said in the History of Ely. For, if he had translated all, there would have been no need for Ælfric, abbat of Winchester, and afterwards archbishop of York, (and different from Ælfric, archbishop of Canterbury, as is evidently proved by Mr. Wharton, in his dissertation, *De duobus Ælfricis*, in *Anglia Sacra*, tom. i. p. 125. which had been also hinted before, with an argument or two to confirm it by the learned Mr. John Josselin, in his preface to 'A testimony of Antiquity,' &c. I say there would have been no need for Ælfric) to have translated any part anew afterwards, as 'tis certain he did, and I believe was induced to the task to supply and complete the version of King Alfred. See more of the Saxon Version of the Old and New Testament at the beginning of Dr. Marshall's *Observationes in versionem Anglo-Sax. of the New Testament*, where he mentions several versions of parts of the Scripture in this language." HEARNE, p. 213.

¹ Vitell. A. 15.

² "A transcript of this MS. made by Junius, is in the Bodleian library, Jun. 70. and this has the same abrupt ending. Wanley 96." TURNER, ii. p. 94.

³ See *Archæologia*, vol. xiii. pp. 36—37.

library, in 1315*, that among its MSS. was one entitled, "Liber Alured regis de custodiendis accipitribus." "This book," observes Mr. Turner, to whom I am indebted for these notices of Alfred's minor works, "corresponds with the fact mentioned by Asser, that Alfred was accustomed 'to teach his falconers, and hawkers, and hound-trainers.'"

Mention is also made by ancient writers of the Proverbs and Parables of King Alfred†. Something of this kind has been preserved by Sir John Spelman from a Cottonian MS.‡, which has been burnt since his time, and is no longer legible. As the precepts which have been preserved are curious and instructive, the whole paragraph with which Spelman introduces them to the notice of his readers^a is worthy of our attention.

"There is in that well-known library, now Sir Thomas Cotton's, a manuscript collection of diverse precepts and instructions of King Alfred's, tending to the purpose we now speak of; and by the courtesy of Sir Thomas I am provided with a copy of them. But, as they are, I cannot think it fit to offer them unto the world, as an instance of what the king composed. For they are not his very work in the Saxon tongue, but a miscellaneous collection of some later author, who, according to his own faculty, hath, in a broken English, put together such of the sayings of King Ælfred, as he met withal, some of them

* See Wanley's preface.

† "So the MS. Chron. Joan. Oxenedes says, '*Parabolæ ejus plurimum habentes edificationis, venustatis, jucunditatis et nobilitatis.*' Cott. Lib. MSS. Nero D. 2.—Ail. Riev., who lived then, [i. e. in the reign of Hen. II.] declares, '*Extant parabolæ ejus &c.* using nearly the same words as Oxenedes, p. 355." TURNER.

^a Galba, A, 19.

^a Life of Alfred, p. 125.

rhyming, and others (as perhaps the original was) in prose: and besides that in their order they somewhat argue the collector's want of judgment. For marshalling them no better, the copy is so faulty and ill-written, in a mongrel hand, (as well as language,) as that, unless I should, without regard, venture to trespass the truth, I dare not publish it according to the copy I have taken. Therefore, whereas there are thirty-one heads of the sayings of the king, all beginning with these words, 'THUS quoth Alfred,' I take them not all, only the beginning of them, and three or four of the first also, (which are the perfectest,) I have (to shew the style and manner of them) set down, in the words that I have copied them, together with the current sense they have in speech at this day. For the residue I have taken such as I presume I read right and understand, and I have only set them down in English, noting them with figures, according to the number or place they hold among the rest.

"The beginning of them is very much to be considered; for that it importeth as if there were some assembly of the chief of both orders of the kingdom called together at Sifford (or Seafford^b) in Oxfordshire, and as if the king had there consulted with his clergy, nobles, and others, about the manners and government of the people, and had there delivered some grave admonitions and instructions concerning the same, to be (as one would think) divulged throughout the kingdom. For it first mentioning the as-

^b This is a mistake of Sir John Spelman. The Anglo-Saxon name of Shifford is Scifford, which is pronounced, as we still pronounce it, Shifford, and means the "sheep-ford," not "sea-ford." It is in the parish of Banpton.

sembly, and commending the king, it saith, that he began to teach those that could hear him how they should lead their lives; and then setteth down those thirty-one heads as particulars of his teaching, confirming thereby that which we have already (from other authorities) alleged, concerning his care and travail for the instruction and reformation of his people^c.”

Such is the list of books which have been ascribed to this great intellect: others perhaps may have perished by time, and even their names been lost to posterity; at the same time it is probable, that from his great literary reputation, many works may in after-ages have been attributed to him which were only written by his command, and perhaps also some with which he was in no way connected.

The fame of so many labours, both physical, mental, and political, spread widely throughout the world even during Alfred's life: his own mind, also, expanded beyond the limits of Britain, and even of the continent of Europe. “We have seen and read letters,” says Asser, “accompanied with presents, which were sent to him by Abel, the patriarch of Jerusalem;” and the same writer speaks “of the daily embassies sent to

^c Another collection of Proverbs is printed in Hickes's Anglo-Saxon Grammar, p. 222. but it probably has nothing to do with King Alfred. “Amongst Sir Kenelm Digby's MSS. (num. iv.) in the Bodleian library is another tract, called Alfred's Proverbs; which however is of a late date, and contains certain rhapsodies about the different conditions of man's life. The learned Dr Hicks has printed some part of it in his *Thesaurus Lingg.* Sept. p. 222. to whom I refer you for a farther account of it. This I take to be the same sort of book that is mentioned in MS. Laud. G. 9, f. 43, b. where 'tis said that K. Alfred's Proverbs were extant at that time.” HEARNE, p. 131.

him by foreign nations, from the Tyrrhenian sea to the farthest end of Ireland^d." Even this was not the limit of King Alfred's correspondence with foreign parts. In 883, the year when Pope Martin sent to him the piece of the holy Cross, the king sent two of his nobles or ministers on a mission to the East Indies. These emissaries, stopping at Rome, deposited there the alms which the king had vowed, and then proceeding on their voyage, conveyed to India a similar present for the apostles St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew, who were supposed to have evangelized those countries. Such is the brief notice of this embassy in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which adds, that the king had made a vow to this effect, "when they sat down against the [Danish] army at London," and when, "thanks be to God, they largely obtained the object of their prayer after the vow*."

^d Wise proposes to read *Hiberiæ Spain*, instead of *Hiberniæ Ireland*: it is not of much importance.

* "Sax. Chron. Fl. Wigorn. a. 883. A siege or occupation of London, in 883, is not here spoken of, but merely the fulfilling of a vow made (in 872) when the Danes occupied London. Henry of Huntingdon rightly understands the passage: '*Alfredus misit elemosynam suam Romæ, et etiam in Indiam ad S. Thomam, secundum votum quod fecerat quando hostilis exercitus hiemavit apud Londoniam.*' So also Alfred of Beverley." LAPPENBERG, ii. p. 71. note 3. See page 136 of this volume. None of the chroniclers have mentioned a siege of London in 872: on the contrary, it would appear from their narrative, that the departure of the Danes from London was effected without Alfred's intervention. There is evidently an omission of some fact necessary to connect the course of events. John Brompton indicates something like a siege of London in 872—3, and I have no doubt that his account contains some truth in it. But his chronology for all Alfred's reign is erroneous, and his facts much confused. A new edition of this author, carefully collated with the MSS. is much wanted

"Such a step," says the historian Lappenberg^f, "on the part of a monarch of Alfred's character, will excite in us but little surprise, and even that little will be diminished, if we call to mind the pilgrimages that had long been usual to the pillar of Simeon Stylites, and many places regarded as holy, and every doubt obviated by the oriental gems brought back by his envoys, some of which were in existence after a lapse of centuries^g. The splendid colouring given by later historians to this mission, by making Sighelm bishop of Sherborne, and calling Æthelstan an alderman^h, has contributed much to create doubts of its reality. Sighelm did not receive the bishopric of Sherborne till the death of Asser, twenty-seven years later."

In 884, Pope Martin died, and was succeeded by Adrian III. It seems as if his communications with Alfred had ended in the more regular transmission of gifts to Rome. Thus in 887 we read in the Saxon Chronicle, "This year Alderman Æthelelm carried the alms of the West-Saxons and of King Alfred to Rome." The next year, also, i. e. in 888, "Beocca the Alderman carried the alms of the West-Saxons and of King Alfred to Rome." The following year we read, "there was no journey to Rome, except that King Alfred sent two couriers with letters:" but in 890 the mission is again mentioned: "This year," says the Chronicle, "Abbat Bernhelm carried the alms of the West-Saxons and of King Alfred to Rome."

^f Ibid. vol. ii. p. 71.

^g "W. Mahm. ii. 4. 'Sigelinus Indiam penetravit; inde rediens, exoticos splendores gemmarum, et liquores aromatum, quorum illa humus ferax est, reportavit.' Id. de Gestis Pontif. ii. adds, 'Nonnullæ illarum (gemmarum) adhuc in ecclesiæ monumentis visuntur.'"

^h Brompton calls him Comes Wiltoniæ.

A curious anecdote, quite in unison with the superstitions of the age, is related in the Saxon Chronicle, as happening in the year 891. "Three Scots came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars from Ireland, whence they had stolen away, because they desired for the love of God to be in a state of pilgrimage, they recked not where. The boat, in which they came, was made of two hides and a half; and they took with them provisions sufficient for seven days; and then about the seventh day they came on shore in Cornwall, and soon after went to King Alfred. Their names were Dubslane, Macbeth, and Maclinmum."

A remarkable circumstance, illustrative of Alfred's character, must not be passed over in silence, because it shews the king's patronage of merit, wherever it was to be found. The rustic, in whose cottage Alfred passed some time in Somersetshire, made such an impression on the king by his superior abilities, that, when the land had peace, he was invited to Court, received education, and was finally made bishop of Winchesterⁱ.

When we reflect on the extraordinary variety of these cares and pursuits, together with the repeated attacks on the Pagans, his wars, and the daily occupation of carrying on the government, it is impossible too highly to extol the character of Alfred. When we again consider the thorn in the flesh, which he constantly bore about him, that from his twentieth year to the end of his life he "was constantly afflicted with the most severe attacks of an unknown and incurable complaint, and that he had not a moment's ease, either from the pain which it caused him, or from the gloom which was

ⁱ His name was Denulf. FLOR. WIG. See page 218.

thrown over him by the apprehension of its coming¹;" our admiration of his character is lost in astonishment, and we may in vain search all history, ancient or modern, to furnish his parallel.

There is, however, another field of action on which Alfred's merits conspicuously displayed themselves—the science of legislation and government, which, as it is of the highest importance to mankind, because on it in a great measure depends the happiness of our species, we shall reserve for consideration in the next chapter.

¹ Asser, anno 888.

CHAP. XXIII.

SAXON LAWS OF ETHELBERT, INA, WITHRED, AND OFFA—ALFRED COMPILES A CODE—EXAMPLES OF HIS LAWS QUOTED—HIS STRICT ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE—NUMEROUS APPEALS TO HIM FROM THE INFERIOR COURTS—HIS MODE OF REPRIMANDING AND TEACHING HIS IGNORANT JUDGES—HIS SEVERITY IN PUNISHING THE CORRUPT—HIS REFORMS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF COUNTIES, HUNDREDS, AND TITHINGS—INSTITUTION OF JUDGES AND SHERIFFS—THE INSTITUTION OF FRANKPLEDGE—HIS ABSOLUTE POWER—DIVISION OF HIS INCOME, AND ECONOMY OF HIS TIME.

THE remains of Anglo-Saxon legislation earlier than the time of Alfred are few and imperfect. Ninety short sentences contain all that has been preserved of the laws of Ethelbert, king of Kent. Sixteen sentences contain the Dooms of his successors Lothaire and Edric, and twenty sentences comprise all the laws that have survived of Withred, another king of the same province^a. The subjects to which these ordinances apply are a few of the most obvious injuries that occur in a simple state of society. It is remarkable, that almost every crime, from murder to the smallest petty larceny, had its value, and might be compensated by the payment of a sum of money. Another celebrated legislator was Ina, king of the West-Saxons, and a few

^a They occupy from p. 1 to 43, of vol. i. of Thorpe's *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*.

pages of his laws also have been preserved^b. It must not however be omitted, that the laws of Ina have come down to us not in a separate and independent form, but appended to those of Alfred, to whose care in collecting and preserving the ancient jurisprudence of his country we are indebted for all that we now know of the subject.

As the West-Saxons owed their principal code of laws to Ina, so was Offa, the legislator of the Mercians : but his laws have not been preserved; and if in later times Alfred published a separate collection for the use of Mercia with the laws of Offa annexed, as those of Ina were attached to the laws of Wessex, that collection also has either perished, or has not yet been discovered. It might be expected that the laws of a people, emerging, under the auspices of the Church, from barbarism, would be strongly tinged with the opinions of the clerks who compiled them. In fact, the whole of these legislative codes are based upon the authority of the Scriptures and of the Church. The first ordinance of Ethelbert enacts, that the abstraction of any property belonging to God or to the Church shall be compensated for by twelve-times its value.

The Laws of Alfred plead the authority of the Apostolic Council held in Jerusalem, and of the Constitutions which the Church had gradually collected since the times of the Apostles.

“Wherefore I Alfred king”—continues the code to which we refer^c—“gathered these together, and commanded many of those to be written which our forefathers held, those which to me seemed good; and many of those which seemed to me not good, I rejected,

^b From p. 102 to 151 of the same work; but half of these pages is occupied by the English translation.

^c Ibid. p. 59.

by the counsel of my 'witan' [parliament], and in other wise commanded them to be holden; for I durst not venture to set down in writing much of my own; for it was unknown to me what of it would please those who should come after us. But those things which I met with, either of the days of Ina my kinsman, or of Offa, king of the Mercians, or of Ethelbert, who first among the English race received baptism, those which seemed to me the rightest, those I have here gathered together, and rejected the others. I then Alfred, king of the West-Saxons, shewed these to all my witan, and they then said that it seemed good to them all to be holden."

The nature of all the laws in Alfred's code is peculiar and striking to our present notions. The principle of compensation for offences, of values attached to different ranks, and of taking sanctuary in the Church until the compensation could be assessed, engendered a complicated system, which ramified into almost as many precedents as there were cases. An instance or two of these laws will set this in a stronger light.

"If any one, for whatever crime, flee to any of the minster-hams, &c. let him have three days to protect himself, unless he be willing to come to terms. If during this space any one harm him by blow or by bond, or wound him, let him make compensation, &c. for each of these according to regular usage, &c. &c. and to the brotherhood, 120 shillings as compensation for the church-frith [*breach of church privilege*], &c."

"If a man be born dumb or deaf, so that he cannot acknowledge or confess his offences, let his father make compensation for his misdeeds."

"If a man, kinless of paternal relatives, fight, and slay a man; then, if he have maternal relatives, let them pay a third of the 'wer' [*fine or compensation-*

money], his guild-brethren another third, and for a third let him flee. If he have no maternal relatives, let his guild-brethren pay half, and for the other half let him flee."

The law concerning 'boc-lands' [No. 41.] seems to shew, that a species of entail existed as early as the days of Alfred.

"The man who has boc-land,"—i. e. land held by deeds or writings,—“and which his kindred left him, we ordain that he must not give it from his kinsfolk; if there be writing or witness that it was forbidden by those men who at first acquired it, and by those who gave it to him, that he should do so; and then let that be declared in the presence of the king and of the bishop, before his kinsmen.”

The laws of Ina, adopted by Alfred for his own, are of the same general character: the following examples may suffice.

“Let a child, within thirty days, be baptized. If it be not so, let him make compensation with thirty shillings: but, if it die without baptism, let him make compensation for it with all that he has.”

“If any one be guilty of death, and he flee to a church, let him have his life, and make compensation as the law may direct him. If any one put his hide in peril, and flee to a church, let the scourging be forgiven him.”

“If any one steal, so that his wife and his children know it not, let him pay 60 shillings, as compensation: but if he steal with the knowledge of all his household, let them all go into slavery. A boy of ten years may be privy to a theft.”

It is manifest that such laws as these belong to an infant state of things, and can be of no other use in

the present day than as illustrating the steps by which legislation has progressed from its first simple elements, to the long and laborious Acts of Parliament by which our existing society is regulated.

It is of more importance to the character of Alfred, that the laws, such as they were in his time, were equitably administered. In every country and in every age, those who possess wealth and influence insensibly form themselves into a caste, from which they endeavour to exclude those who have fewer advantages than themselves. Almost all the revolutions which have afflicted the world, have arisen out of the difficulty of adjusting rights between the higher and lower classes of society. It is to be believed, for the credit of our nature, that these strifes would have been prevented, if the contending parties could have agreed beforehand that each should take charge of the interests of the other. The practice of the truly Christian rule, to do to others as you would they should do unto you, would sever all the discords which are engendered among mankind. The rich, even those who are most elevated and pampered by their prosperity, have still a spark of kindly feeling towards those who are struggling beneath them, and to whose level they know they themselves, in the vicissitude of things, are liable to be reduced. On the other hand, the poor in general are unwilling to destroy every thing above them, because, in a moment of accidental prosperity, they may hope to rise to a higher position and to enjoy a larger portion of the goods of life. If reason could usurp her rights over the minds of men, many of the evils which spring from the collision of classes would vanish. But man is mostly subject to the dictates not of reason, but of

passion, and that which reason would have guided into the harbour of safety, becomes, under the conduct of passion, an entangled maze, out of which nothing but just and equitable laws can extricate mankind. In the civil wars which so long afflicted England in the time of Alfred, the nobles had attained to such a pitch of lawlessness and self-will, that the rights of their inferiors were little respected, and the courts of justice, if not entirely suppressed, were merely legalized forms of injustice, which, dictated from the mouth of ignorance, were carried into effect by the hand of oppression. To remedy this evil was the principal aim and the highest glory of Alfred. He who pronounces a just sentence, unbiassed by the frowns of power or the allurements of favour, exalts himself above his equals, and commands the respect of mankind. "The poor," says Asser,—and the poor in those days comprehended probably every one but the king, the nobles, and the church,—"had no other protector but the king." What a comprehensive and magnificent idea of kingly power is compressed into that sentence! With what eagerness will all men strive to defend the throne, which is built upon such a basis, the basis of equally administering justice, and of protecting those who are unable to protect themselves!

The king's courts, in those times, were more properly so called than at present. The sovereign himself, like the eastern caliphs, often administered justice in person: Alfred certainly did so; and Asser records to his praise, that he strove, in his own judgments, to hold the scales of justice even between all his subjects, whether noble or ignoble. At the courts held by his earls and prefects, the most unbecoming quarrels often arose: the suitors seldom acquiesced in the sentence

which those officers pronounced ; and sought with the greatest eagerness to carry their causes before the king himself. "If any one," continues Asser, "was conscious of injustice on his side in the suit, though by law and agreement he was compelled, however reluctant, to go before the king, yet with his own good will he never would consent to go. For he knew that in the king's presence no part of his wrong would be hidden ; and no wonder, for the king was a most acute investigator in passing sentence, as he was in all other things. He enquired into almost all the judgments which were given in his own absence, throughout all his dominions, whether they were just or unjust. If he perceived there was iniquity in those judgments, he summoned the judges, either through his own agency, or through others of his faithful servants, and asked them mildly, why they had judged so unjustly ; whether through ignorance or malevolence ; i. e. whether for the love or fear of any one, or hatred of others ; or perhaps for the desire of money. At length, if the judges acknowledged they had given judgment because they knew no better, he discreetly and moderately reproved their inexperience and folly in such terms as these : "I wonder truly at your insolence, that, whereas by God's favour and mine, you have occupied the rank and office of the wise, you have neglected the studies and labours of the wise : either, therefore, at once give up the discharge of the temporal duties which you hold, or endeavour more zealously to study the lessons of wisdom. Such are my commands." At these words the earls and prefects would tremble, and endeavour to turn all their thoughts to the study of justice, so that, wonderful to say, almost all his earls, prefects, and officers, though

unlearned from their cradles, were sedulously bent upon acquiring learning, choosing rather laboriously to acquire the knowledge of a new discipline, than to resign their functions.

It sometimes happened that Alfred's earls and prefects were too old or of too dense intellect to begin to learn to read. In such a case, Alfred took their sons or some more distant kinsman, whom he instructed to read to them; or if no other person could be found, he made one of his own men, whom he had brought up to reading, undertake the office of teacher, and recite Saxon books before the ignorant noblemen, whenever they could find time for so doing. The result of this useful but to us rather humourous process was, that the nobles, in the words of Asser, "lamented with deep sighs, in their inmost hearts, that in their youth they had never attended to such studies; and they blessed the young men of our days, who happily could be instructed in the liberal arts, whilst they execrated their own lot, that they had not learned these things in their youth, and now, when they were old, though wishing to learn them, they were unable. The ignorance and other deficiencies of Alfred's judges were, however, leniently dealt with, in comparison with the punishment which the king inflicted on partiality and wilful injustice. His severity on this head has been recorded in general terms by Asser, but we learn from a work called the *Miroir des Justices*, written by Andrew Horne in the reign of Edward II, that perversion of justice met with no connivance from this inflexibly upright king. "He hanged Cadwine, because he condemned Hachwy to death, without the assent of all the jurors, in a case where he put himself upon the jury of twelve men; and because Cadwine

removed three who wished to save him against the nine, for three others into whose jury this Hachwy did not put himself."

"He hanged Markes, because he adjudged During to death by twelve men not sworn."

"He hanged Freberne, because he adjudged Harpin to death when the jurors were in doubt about their verdict; for when in doubt, we ought rather to save than condemn*."

In all, the author of the *Miroir des Justices* has recorded forty-four cases of punishment, more or less severe, which Alfred inflicted on those who had perverted the integrity of the judgment-seat.

It has been said, that Alfred, for the better administration of justice, first divided the kingdom into counties, each of which was subdivided into hundreds, and each hundred into tithings. We find no trace of this in the earlier chronicles, and it is unlikely that Asser would have overlooked so important an institution, if it had been introduced by the policy of Alfred. It is another strong argument against the theory, that several of the English counties occur in the chronicles long before the time of Alfred: others were evidently carved out of the ruins of the Heptarchy: and all of them came into existence at different times, according to the various circumstances which gave them birth. A striking instance in support of this theory is, that during the whole reign of Alfred, the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk were still undivided, and both formed the kingdom of East Anglia, whilst the whole of Mercia,

* The *Miroir des Justices* has been published in a small volume, London 1642, containing the original Norman French, and also in a similar volume, containing an English translation, London, 1646. See pages 296, 298.

or at least the greater part of it, became one large earldom, the several counties, into which it was afterwards parcelled, not being yet in existence.

But, although several of the English counties are certainly older than the time of Alfred, we must not altogether hastily dismiss the express statement of Ingulf, who is a very respectable chronicler, where he is not misled by the charters of his own monastery. "The king," says he, "wishing to check and restrain robbers, was the first who changed the districts and provinces of England into counties." We may perhaps reasonably infer, that though not the original author of the division into counties, yet the king availed himself of that division to promote his own views, and perhaps arranged the administration of these counties on a more regular and systematic plan than before. Whatever change he wrought in the counties themselves, it is less a matter of doubt that their subdivision into hundreds, and of hundreds into tithings, is one of the features of his administration. Both Ingulf and Malmesbury agree in this statement. The words of the latter may be quoted on this subject. "Amid the sound of trumpets and the din of war, Alfred enacted statutes by which his people might equally familiarize themselves to religious worship and to military discipline. And since, from the example of the barbarians, the natives themselves began to lust after rapine, insomuch that there was no safe intercourse without a military guard, he appointed centuries, which they call 'Hundreds,' and decennaries, or 'Tithings,' so that every Englishman, living according to law, should be a member of both.

The custody of each province had been formerly in the care of the earl or alderman, who had under him

an assistant officer, called *præfectus*, or *vicedominus*. These officers united the political with the judicial functions. This anomaly was soon detected by Alfred, who separated their duties, and appointed judges, or, as they were called in Ingulf's time, justices, to decide causes, whilst the sheriffs, as the other officers were named, continued to exercise the duties which properly belonged to them.

Springing out of the civil division of the county into hundreds and tithings, is another institution, that of Frank-pledge, as it is generally called, which has been ascribed to Alfred, not by any of the earlier chroniclers, but by Ingulf and Malmesbury, from whom succeeding writers have mostly copied. "If any one was accused of any crime, he was obliged immediately to produce persons from the hundred and tithing to become his surety, and if any one was unable to find a surety, he had cause to dread the severity of the law. If any one who was impleaded made his escape either before or after he had found a surety, all persons of the hundred and tithing paid a fine to the king. By this regulation Alfred diffused such peace throughout the country, that he ordered golden bracelets to be hung up in the cross roads, tempting the cupidity of those who passed, though no one dared to touch them^b."

^b "Nearly similar is what is related of king Edwin, (see [Lappenberg.] vol. i. p. 153.) and also of Frothi king of Denmark, (Saxo Gram. t. i. p. 247. Chron. Erixi, No. 35.) of Rollo duke of Normandy, (Dudo, p. 64.) and of Briant king of Munster, (Depping, Expeditions, &c. t. i. p. 131.)" LAPP. vol. ii. p. 68.

"These are probably the fictions of a posterior age; but they serve to shew the high estimation in which Alfred's administration of justice was held by our forefathers." LINGARD, vol. i. p. 178.

When we consider the different occupations with which the busy mind of Alfred was continually engrossed, the question naturally occurs, how he could find time for accomplishing so many things. It may be admitted, that he possessed external advantages which had fallen to the lot of none of his predecessors, but these advantages were all of his own acquirement, and therefore, so far from explaining, they rather add to the credit of his achievements. As he prevailed in a war, which had destroyed all the other kingdoms of the Heptarchy, there were no surviving rights of any one, against which he could be a trespasser. And, as there is no authority more complete than that which follows conquest by the sword, so Alfred, having wrested the land which he ruled out of the hands of an enemy, found his authority unbounded except by the limits of the island itself; and the tenure, by which he held it, was in fact the law of his own will. He was consequently, not only greater than any of his predecessors, but possessed absolute power, if he thought proper to use it. If, however, he was checked by a sense of what was due to his subjects, and modified his own authority by enacting wise and equal laws: this is a subject of panegyric, and leaves his fame brighter than it otherwise would have been; for such a mode of administering the kingly authority, so far from enslaving Alfred, made him more truly powerful, and gave him the good will of his people, which was the ablest instrument he could employ for the accomplishment of his great and useful ends.

But we must ascribe the magnitude and number of Alfred's deeds to the strict economy of his time and of his revenue, and the wise adjustment of both to the enterprises which he had in hand.

We have already noticed the king's annual division of his income into two equal parts, one of which was devoted to the expenses of the state and of his own household, the other to pious uses, to charity, and the service of God. The subordinate arrangements for carrying into effect these intentions are told us by Asser, in these words: "He assigned the first half of his revenue to worldly purposes, and ordered that one-third of this half should be paid to his soldiers and his ministers, the nobles who resided at his court, where they discharged various duties: for the king's household was at all times arranged in three classes. His attendants were most wisely distributed into three companies, so that the first company should be on duty at court for one month, night and day, at the end of which time they returned to their homes, and were relieved by the second company. At the end of the second month, the third company, in the same way, relieved the second, who also returned to their homes, where they spent two months, until their services were again wanted. The third company gave place to the first in the same manner, and also spent two months at home. Such was the threefold division of the companies arranged at all times in the royal householdⁱ.

ⁱ "I should conjecture that the king, for his more honourable attendance, took this course in point of royalty and state, there being (as it then stood with the state) very few men of quality fit to stand before a king, who by their fortunes or dependency were not elsewhere besides engaged; neither was there in those times any great assurance to be had of any man, unless he was one of such condition, whose service when the king was fain to use one month in the quarter, it was necessary for the common-wealth, that he should remit them the other two months unto their own occasions. Neither used he this

“ To these therefore was paid the first of the three portions aforesaid, to each according to their respective dignities and peculiar service : the second was for the payment of the operatives, whom he had collected out of every nation, and kept about him in large numbers, men skilled in every kind of construction ; the third portion was assigned to foreigners, who came to him out of every nation far and near ; whether they asked money of him or not, he cheerfully gave to each with wonderful munificence in proportion to their respective merits, according to what is written, ‘ God loveth a cheerful giver.’

“ But the second part of all the revenues, which came yearly into his possession, and was included in the receipts of his exchequer, as we mentioned a little before, he, with ready devotion, gave to God, ordering his ministers to divide it again into four parts, with the condition that the first of these four parts should be bestowed on the poor of every nation who came to him ; and on this subject he said, that, as far as human discretion could guarantee, the remark of Pope Gregory should be followed : ‘ Give not much to whom you should give little, nor little to whom much, nor something to whom nothing is due, nor nothing to whom something.’ The second of the four portions was given

course with some of his officers only, (as there are those that understand it to have been a course taken only with those of his guard,) but with all his whole attendance ; neither used he it for a time only, but for his whole life, as Ingulfus expressly tells us : and I little doubt but that the use at Court at this day, of officers, Quarter-waiters, had the first beginning even from this invention of the king’s.” SPELMAN, p. 199.—“ *Hac revolutione servorum suorum totiusque familie sue rotatione usus est omni tempore vite sue.*” INGULF.

to the two monasteries^k, which he had built, and to those who therein had dedicated themselves to God's service, as we have mentioned above. The third portion was assigned to the school, which he had studiously collected together, consisting of many of the nobility of his own nation. The fourth portion was for the use of all the neighbouring monasteries in all Saxony and Mercia^l, and also during some years, in turn, to the churches and servants of God dwelling in Britain^m, Cornwall, Gaul, Armorica, Northumberland, and sometimes even in Ireland, according to his means, he either distributed to them beforehand, or proposed to do so afterwards, if life and prosperity should not fail him."

With equal exactitude, Alfred apportioned his own time between his spiritual and temporal duties; but his biographer has not been equally minute in describing this particular, as in the division of his income. We have noticed in a former chapterⁿ, the expedient of wax lights, and lanterns, to which the king had recourse for ascertaining the lapse of time. Asser informs us that he dedicated half his service to the world, and half to God; but William of Malmesbury says with more minuteness, that he employed "eight hours in writing, reading, and prayer, eight in the refreshment of his body, and eight in dispatching the business of the realm." This regularity of system must have been of the greatest service to the king, and have enabled him

^k Athelney and Shaftesbury.

^l Saxony now became the general name for Wessex, Kent, and Sussex combined. Mercia is added, because it was now no longer a separate kingdom.

^m i. e. Wales.

ⁿ See page 313.

to accomplish much more than he otherwise could have done ; and it set an example to his subjects, of the utmost importance to a nation, which was saved from destruction, that it might become a monument to posterity of the greatness of their king.

CHAP. XXIV.

HASTING, FOILED ON THE CONTINENT, SUDDENLY INVADES ENGLAND IN 893—HE FORMS TWO ENTRENCHED CAMPS IN KENT, AT APPLEDORE AND MILTON—ALFRED FORTIFIES A POSITION BETWEEN THE TWO CAMPS—BATTLE OF FARNHAM—ALFRED BESIEGES THE DANES IN MERSEY-ISLAND, BUT IS CALLED OFF TO DEFEND EXETER—DANISH CAMP TAKEN—HASTING'S WIFE AND CHILDREN MADE PRISONERS, BUT RELEASED—HASTING FORTIFIES BEMFLEET AND SHOBURY IN ESSEX—THE DANES CROSS ENGLAND TO BUTTINGTON—SIEGE AND BATTLE OF BUTTINGTON—THE DANES, DEFEATED, ESCAPE TO ESSEX—THEY AGAIN CROSS ENGLAND TO CHESTER—RAVAGE WALES, AND RETURN TO ESSEX—THEY ENCAMP ON THE LEA—ALFRED OBSTRUCTS THEIR NAVIGATION—THE DANES RETIRE TO QUATERBRIDGE IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE, WHERE THEIR ARMY IS BROKEN UP.

WHEN England had enjoyed fifteen years of peace, and, under the administration of her wise and patriotic king, was progressing with rapid strides in all that tends towards national prosperity, her repose was suddenly broken by the loud cry of war and of invasion. It was a trying moment to the king, when he found himself again called to arms, and was obliged to interrupt both his own studies, and the plans which he was daily forming for the amelioration of his countrymen. The storm which fell on England in 893 was more violent than that which, fifteen years ago, had swept before it, for a moment, both the king and his throne. But if the enemy were strong to attack,

much more so was Alfred to defend, for he had improved to the utmost every hour of the interval which had passed, and the trial, to which he was now exposed, only proved the wisdom and efficacy of the precautions which he had taken against such an emergency. As a fitting introduction to the long campaign between King Alfred and the new army of Danes which in 893 invaded England, we must notice the operations of the famous Danish leader Hasting on the continent, the ill success of which led to his landing in England^a.

In 890, "Hasting with his Danes had encamped at Argove, on the right bank of the Somme, and, in the following year, after having, in contravention of his word, attacked the abbey of St. Vedast, he took up his quarters at Amiens. A detachment of his forces, consisting of five hundred and fifty men, made an attempt on the city of St. Omer's, the fortifications of which were only just begun; but the brave inhabitants killed more than half of them, and with equal good fortune repelled another attack, in which the barbarians had endeavoured to set fire to the place^b." The same year, 891, was still more disastrous to the Danes in Flanders. Arnulf, king of Germany, inflicted on them a severe defeat on the banks of the river Dyle, near Louvain^c:

^a See the account of their proceedings in pages 248—250.

^b Lappenberg, vol. ii. p. 75.

^c "On the 26th of June was the defeat of the Germans on the river Geul. Cf. Depping, *Expéditions*, &c. t. ii. p. 35. In the *Annal. Fuldens. h. a.* the deficiency after *Kalendis* is undoubtedly to be supplied by *Septembris*, which was long after celebrated in commemoration of the defeat of the Northmen at Louvain on that day. According to the *Annal. Vedast. h. a.* the battle did not take place till the beginning of December. In the *Annal. Fuldens.* the account of the death of the Danish kings, Sigfrid and Gottfrid, is probably erroneous, as the *Annal. Vedast.* and *Rhegiuo* make mention of the death of both kings under the years 886 and 887." LAPPENB. ii. 75.

this battle was fought on the 1st of September, but the Danes, notwithstanding their defeat, kept possession of Louvain more than fifteen months longer. Whilst this ill success attended his countrymen in the East, Hasting, more fortunate than they, repulsed Eudes from Amiens, and afterwards attacked him in the province of Vermandois. This variable fortune was not to the taste of these Danish freebooters: though they had done much mischief both to France and Germany, yet they were continually driven back to the mouths of the great rivers where their fleets were moored, and their entrenched camps were generally constructed. Here they resumed their vigour, and acting on the offensive, maintained their positions against all assailants. But in 893 a severe famine visited the north of France, which made it inexpedient for the Danes to remain any longer on a coast, where, instead of gaining booty, they were in danger of being starved. Collecting therefore their scattered bands, they drew together at Boulogne, and determined to try their fortune once more in an invasion of England^d. Nearly the whole of Sussex and the Weald of Kent were covered at that time and long after with an immense forest, called Anderida by the Romans and ancient Britons, and afterwards abbreviated into Andred by the Saxons. Its extent was a hundred and twenty miles long from east to west, and thirty in breadth from the sea-coast towards the inland country. On the eastern side of this large forest, the river Limene^e,

^d Ibid.

^e "The Saxon Chronicle calls it Limene; and so, with a little variation, the other old writers; which, however, is not denied to be the same with what is now called the Rother. But [Spelman] is certainly mistaken in supposing the mouth of it in those times to be where

now called the Rother, flows out of the Weald into the sea, forming for a certain distance the frontier between Sussex and Kent. The estuary of this river is now choked up with soil, the accumulation of centuries, but in the time of Alfred it formed a capacious harbour. The Danish host, assembled at Boulogne, embarked horses and men in two hundred and fifty vessels, and the first news which the South-Saxons and Kentish men received of the enemy's intentions was the news of their having come to land at the mouth of the river Limene or Rother, which we have just described^f.

Rye now stands. For there is no doubt to be made that 'twas at New Romney, the channel being altered by a violent tempest in the reign of Edward I. Indeed Antoninus places *Portus Lemanis* . . . but sixteen miles from *Durovernum* . . . or Canterbury, whereas New Romney is twenty-one. But it was easy for the transcriber to put a V for an X: and though Appledore be six miles distant from Romney, yet the estuary was then so very large, (however altered since by the change of the channel,) that Appledore was not above four miles, as hinted in the *Saxon Annals*, . . . from the river's mouth. See more in Mr. Somner's *History of the Roman ports and forts in Kent*, p. 37. &c." HEARNE, p. 78.

^f Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Sim. Hunt. Lappenberg thinks, that the commander of this detachment was Biörn lærnside, an old companion in arms of Hasting. "The English chroniclers," says he, "make no mention here of Biörn, but speak only of 'a king.' My assumption is founded on the following passage of Guido, ap. Alberic. a. 895. '*Bier[n.] totius excidii signifer et exercituum rex, iterum Gallias infestans, ad extremum ab Arnulfo imperatore et Francis multis præliis victus, in Angliam, opportunum suæ tyrannidis suffugium, est expulsus, sed (ab) Anglis iterum victus, indeque Frisiam petens, mortuus est ibidem.*' Will. of Jumièges (lib. i. c. 11.) must, however, not be unnoticed: '*Bier, totius excidii signifer exercituumque rex, dum nativum solum repeteret, naufragium passus, vix apud Anglos portum obtinuit, quam pluribus de suis navibus submersis. Indeque Frisiam repetens, ibidem obiit*

Towing their ships up this river as far as four miles into the Weald, they came upon a fortress, defended by a few peasants^g, and still only half finished. This they immediately took and destroyed, after which they constructed an intrenched camp near the small town of Appledore^h. Soon after, Hasting himself, with eighty shipsⁱ, entered the Swale, a small arm of the sea, which runs between the isle of Sheppey and the Kentish coast, and landed at Midiltun, now Milton, where he immediately constructed another of those intrenched camps^k, which were the safeguard of the Danish forces in these predatory invasions. It has been thought that the formation of these two camps, at Appledore and Milton, only twenty miles apart, and forming a military cordon which cut off the greater part of Kent from the rest of the island, was according to a preconceived plan formed by the military genius of Hasting. If this was the case, he was outgeneralled by the

mortem.' Dudo does not mention Biörn. For contemporary accounts concerning him, see also Prudent. Trecens. a. 858. Frag. Chron. Fontan. a. 855-859." LAPP. ii. 75.

^g Ethelwerd calls it an ancient fortress, and says nothing about its unfinished state.

^h Sax. Ch. Ethel. Flor. Hunt.

ⁱ "Depping, ii. 39. says, that these eighty ships sailed from the mouth of the Seine, where they had possessed themselves of the town of Evreux. This error appears to have been occasioned by Asser's Annals, an. 893, where the occupation of Evreux and the flight of bishop Sebar are interpolated, which are copied from Dudo, l. ii. p. 77. If the above-given illustration is just, that event might have taken place in the year 885." LAPPENBERG, vol. ii. p. 76.

^k "Part of it is still remaining, being called Kemsley-castle, on Kemsley-down, in the parish of Milton or Middleton, which is not far distant from Sittingbourne, so named from the wells arising there, &c. See Lambard's Perambulation of Kent, p. 204, 238." HEARNE, p. 79.

superior abilities, or overwhelmed by the greater power of his adversary. Alfred first turning his attention to the Danes of East Anglia and Northumberland, compelled them to make oath that they would not join the new army of their countrymen in Kent. The East Anglians also gave six hostages for their good conduct, and the king, having done all that was in his power in that quarter, began to collect his forces, that he might attack the enemy in the fortified positions which they had taken up. Nearly a year, however, passed before any decisive measures were attempted, and during this interval it became manifest, that no reliance could be placed on the neutrality of the East Anglians or Northumbrians, and that Alfred must again save his country and throne by arms alone from the danger with which it was threatened. The armies in Kent began to practise their usual course of robbery and devastation, and their countrymen from the north and east, disregarding their plighted troth, joined them in these excursions, and even sometimes went out to plunder by themselves. But the interests of the kingdom were not wholly neglected in the north. The brave earl of Mercia, true to the trust which Alfred had reposed in him, "kept the East Anglians and Northumbrians, who were fomenting rebellion against the king, within due bounds, and compelled them to give hostages for their neutrality¹." Alfred, committing to his care the charge of restraining or punishing their breach of faith, marched with his forces between the two armies, and availing himself of the woods and marshes, took up a position^m, so as to command that

¹ Will. Malmesb. ii. 4.

^m "There are yet remaining the ruins of a small castle, called Bavord castle, on the other side of the river, opposite to Keinsley

of the enemy, and protect the country from their ravaging bands. This bold measure, which was no doubt justified by the strength of Alfred's military preparations and the number of his men, seems to have alarmed the enemy, and to have hampered them in their movements: for "from this time," we read in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "the enemy always went out along the weald in bands and troops, by whichever border was at this time without forces: and they were also pursued by other bands, almost every day, either by night or day, as well from the king's forces as from the towns."

The system of military defence which Alfred had devised during the interval of peace was now fully tested, and its utility developed. The strong position which he had taken up separated the two bodies of the Danes, and prevented their acting in concert. The citizens, also, of the different towns, as appears from the extract just quoted, no longer fell an easy prey to those who attacked them, but took measures in their own defence, and even ventured to pursue their aggressors. The wisdom of the king's arrangement, by which his army was divided into two parts, so as to relieve one another, now became apparent. Besides the garrisons of the towns, an effective army was always in the field, and the others who, at the end of six months, were to succeed them, were in the mean time occupied in cultivating their lands at home. The Danes' forces, we learn, "did not venture castle; where some think 'tis probable Alfred encamped. But others believe that 'tis more likely that 'twas towards the midland parts of Kent, perhaps near Bocton, as being between both armies, and affording a convenient prospect into the two plains." HEARNE, p. 80.

" From the Saxon Chronicle, which now begins to be much more full in its details of these events.

out of their camps with their whole force more than twice ; once when they first came to land, before Alfred's forces were assembled ; and a second time, when they attempted to leave their stations." It was now evident to Hasting that success was hopeless in a country which was defended by the arms and governed by the wisdom of so excellent a king : his Danes had gained much plunder by their excursions, whenever they could elude the vigilance of the Saxons ; but they were unable to move in large numbers from their camps, in which they were pent up, more after the manner of a besieged city than of an invading army. Hasting, still in his camp at Milton, was compelled to sue for peace, which was granted him on condition that he should not molest the dominions of Alfred. To ratify this compact, the two sons of Hasting received baptism with their father's consent, and at the request of Alfred, who was sponsor for the one, and Ethelred, earl of Mercia, for the other. This treaty, however, was no sooner entered into than it was infringed : the faithless Dane, leaving Milton, passed over to Bemfleet in Essex, where he formed another camp of great strength, and placed in it his wife, his children, and the spoil which he had gained.

In the mean time, the Danes at Appledore, finding themselves also hemmed in by Alfred's troops, suddenly left their camp, and marched northwards, as if to cross the Thames, and join their countrymen in Essex ; but the king's forces outrode and overtook them, and in a battle fought at Farnham, defeated the Danes, and retook all the spoil which they were carrying off. From this point it is rather difficult to trace their march, from the brevity which the Chroniclers have used in describing it. " The Danes fled," says the Saxon Chronicle, " over the Thames, where there was no ford, and then up along the Colne

into an island*." Here they were blockaded by the English, as long as the besiegers could procure provisions, but at length, when these failed, they were obliged to abandon the attempt. The six months of their service were also expired, and the king was not yet arrived with the other division who were to replace them. The Danes, however, prevented from moving by a wound which their king had received, continued to occupy the island, and as we hear no more of their proceedings, it is probable that they joined their countrymen at Bemfleet. Whilst these events were passing in the south, the East Anglian and Northumbrian Danes collected their troops, and manning two fleets, sailed to the coast of Devonshire. One of the fleets, consisting of a hundred vessels, sailed up the river Exe, and besieged Exeter: the other, of forty ships, entered the Bristol Channel, and attacked a small fortress on the northern coast of the same county.

The news of these movements, which reached the king's ears as he was marching to relieve the first division of his army in Essex, did not for a moment disturb his equanimity^p, or cause him to hesitate in the active course which alone could save his country. His conduct throughout the whole of this melancholy campaign is described as praiseworthy in the extreme. "With his usual activity," says the Monk of Malmesbury, "the king was present in every action, ever daunting the invaders, and at the same time inspiriting his subjects with the signal display of his own courage. He would oppose himself singly to the enemy; and

* Sax. Ch. an. 894. From the expression of Florence, *intra meatum Colniæ amnis*, it is clear that this was Mersey island.

^p I consider the "*vertitur rex in furorem*" of Florence to be a mere figure of speech, indicating the vigour, not the fury, of the king.

by his own personal exertions rally his forces whenever they were wavering. The very places are still pointed out by the inhabitants, where he felt the vicissitudes of his good or evil fortune."

Undismayed at the intelligence which arrived from Devonshire, the king divided his forces into two bodies, one of which he dispatched against the Danes in Bemfleet, whilst he hastened with the other to raise the siege of Exeter. The party which was detached eastward arrived at London, where they were reinforced by a body of the citizens and others from the west of England, after which they pursued their march to Bemfleet. The great army which had been at Appledore was now within the Danish lines, but Hasting was absent on a plundering excursion, which he was making for the second time in breach of his treaty with the brave Ethelred, in Mercia. The English stormed the fortress, and took all the spoil that was therein, besides all the women and children; they broke in pieces or burnt many of the Danish ships: the rest they carried into Rochester or to London, together with all the prisoners and booty. Among the captives were the wife and children of Hasting: and this calamity having its due effect upon the mind of the haughty Dane, a second treaty was entered into, hostages for its observance were given, and the wife and children sent back unhurt to the Danish camp.

In the mean time, Alfred arrived at Exeter, where he found the enemy laying siege^a to the city: the Danes decamped at his approach, and fled to their ships. The king was thus at liberty to return into the eastern

^a The success of Alfred's system of fortification is remarkable in this campaign: the English cities are no longer taken by a coup de main, as in former years.

parts of the kingdom, but from some circumstances which have not been handed down to us, we find that he remained some weeks longer in Devonshire. During this delay in the west, the broken armies of the enemy had rallied from their late defeats, and again entrenched themselves at Shobury in Essex^r, but soon after being reinforced by a large body of East Anglian and Northumbrian Danes, they marched inland, following the course of the Thames; from thence crossing to the Severn, they marched up the banks of that river to Buttington^s, probably the small town which is still so called, and is situated on a stream of the same name in Gloucestershire. But their progress through Mercia was not effected without rousing its inhabitants to arms. The brave Ethelred, its ruler, together with the aldermen

^r "Ethelwerd mentions that Sigefert came to him with a powerful fleet from Northumbria, p. 847. The Annals of Ulster, p. 65, mention Sigfred, the son of Ingwar, as roaming about the British isles at this period. Ethelwerd notices the death of Guthfred, king of Northumbria at this time, and his burial at York, p. 847. As Sigfred is stated, in the Ulster Annals, to have killed his brother Godfred about this period, p. 65, they are probably the Sigefert and Guthfred of Ethelwerd." Turner, i. 589.

^s Buddingington or Buttington on Sæfern stathe, CHRON. SAX. Budington juxta Severnam, HUNT. ad villam quandam super flumen Sabrinae sitam Buttingedune appellatam, MATT. WESTM. Mr. Walker tells us that it is in Shropshire, Mr. Somner, in Montgomeryshire. Upon which account Dr. Gibson asserts, that he knows of no town of this name upon the Severn in Gloucestershire.... But upon consulting Mr. Adams's Index Villaris, and Mr. Speed's table of this county, I find two towns in this shire answering to this name in the old historians, one called Boddington in Tewkesbury Hundred, and the other Bodendon upon a little branch of the Severn in Cheltenham Hundred; . . . but I do not deny that Buttington in Shropshire, or rather Montgomeryshire, is the place where the Danes intrenched themselves, there being some evident tokens of fortification yet to be seen there." HEARNE, p. 85.

Ethelm and Ethelnoth, and the king's thane, who were in custody of the fortresses in those parts, assembled their troops from all the towns to the east of the river Perrot, and joined by some forces from Mercia and North Wales, they shut the Danish army up in their fortified camp. Here they besieged them several weeks, during the time that the king's army was still at Exeter. At length the besieged began to be in want of food, and were compelled to eat their horses. Some of them died of starvation; the rest, taking courage from despair, sallied out upon the English, who lay upon the eastern side of the Severn, and engaged them in battle. The contest was fierce and bloody; Orthelm and many other king's thanes were slain, but the Danes were entirely defeated, and having lost a large number of men, sought safety in flight. Those who survived this defeat, took refuge at the fortress in Essex; where before the winter they received such reinforcements out of East Anglia and Northumberland, that they were again able to move, and pursue their ravages as before. Committing their ships, their wives, and all their effects to the guardianship of the friendly East Anglians, they "went at one stretch"—such is the expression of the Saxon Chronicle—"day and night," until they arrived at Chester, at that time uninhabited. This march was conducted with such speed, that the English were unable to come up with them: the Danes were already safe within the city, and the troops of Alfred slew all they found without the walls, took all the cattle, and burnt or consumed all the corn in the fields. This happened at the end of 894, not much more than twelve months after Hasting first came over from France.

In the beginning of the following year, the Danes,

distressed for want of the provisions of which Alfred's army had deprived them, entered North Wales, where they ravaged several districts¹, and afterwards crossing England so rapidly that they again distanced their pursuers, they sought a secure position in the island of Mersey, from which the preceding year the English had in vain attempted to dislodge them. Their countrymen also, who had left the siege of Exeter when Alfred's army approached to relieve it, on their voyage towards the same party, stopped on the coast of Sussex, and attempted to plunder the country near Chichester²; but the brave inhabitants, sallying out upon them, slew several hundreds of them, and took some of their ships: the remnant with difficulty escaped. This adventure was the last that happened in the year 895, and the Danes had now been more than two years in England.

At the beginning of the following year, the Danes, sailing up the Thames, turned to the right, and followed the course of the river Lea, until they came to the neighbourhood of the modern towns of Hertford and Ware, about twenty miles from London. Here they constructed their fortifications as usual; and the citizens of London, alarmed at their proximity, marched out at the approach

¹ "Annal. Camb. a. 895. 'Nordmanni venerunt et vastaverunt Loyer (England) et Bricheniauc et Guent et Guinnliguiauc (the marsh district between the Severn, the Wye, and the Tav.)' Morganwg and Buallt are added in Brut y Tywysogion." LAPPENB. ii. p. 78.

² "Matt. West. 346. Bishop Gibson says of Mersey Island, which contains eight parishes, 'It is a place of great strength, and may be almost kept against all the world; for which reason the Parliament clapped in a thousand men to guard it from being seized by the Dutch, about the beginning of the Dutch war.' Camd. 359." Turner, vol. i. 585.

of summer to attack them. In the battle which ensued the Londoners were worsted, and, with the loss of "some four king's thanes^{*}," obliged to retreat. The king now arrived with his troops, and encamped near London to protect the reapers as they were gathering in the crops. One day the king, riding along the banks of the river, observed a place, where the river might be so obstructed that the ships of the Danes would not be able to pass. The idea was immediately put into effect, and two fortresses constructed on the opposite banks of the river. The English had hardly set themselves down to accomplish this work, before the Danes saw the evil which would inevitably ensue to their shipping. Abandoning these to their fate, they hastily left their position on the Lea, and crossing the country, arrived at Quatbridge[†], supposed to be the modern Bridgenorth, or Quatford, on the Severn. Here

^{*} Saxon Ch.

[†] "Cwatbridge, SAX. CH. Cambricge, ETHEL. Quatbrig, FLOR. WIG. Quantebrike, MATT. WESTM. [as in the printed copies; but Cantebricge in MS. Laud. L. 44. Cantebregge in MS. 193, Musei Bodl. Cantebregge in MS. Hatton 97.] Quadruge, HUNT. Brugges BROMT. Mr. Somner is of opinion, that 'tis the same town that is now called Cambridge in Gloucestershire, not far from a branch of the river Severn, called Cann. But this conjecture, as Dr. Gibson [in explicat. nom. locorum ad fin. Chron. Sax.] has very well observed, seems improbable from the distance between the Severn and Cambridge, which is at least two miles, and consequently very badly situated to answer the end of the Danes in raising this fortress, which was to obstruct the passage of the king's ships up this river. Upon which account, considering that one MS. of the Saxon Chron. calls it Bricge, which is the name 'tis vulgarly called by now, and that Quatford is not above a mile from it, he inclines to our celebrated author's [*Spelman's*] opinion, that 'tis the same with Bridgenorth and Quatford in Shropshire. And of this opinion likewise was Mr. Leland, as appears from the first volume of his Collections, f. 199 a." HEARNE, p. 89.

they speedily entrenched themselves, and the third year of the campaign passed away with, apparently, little prospect that a war against so active and vivacious an enemy would ever come to an end.

But, in reality, the strength of the Danish invaders was now departed from them. Though often reinforced by their friends the old Danish settlers, the tide of success was evidently setting against them, and the policy or the mercy of Alfred was directed to separate the interests of the Danes located in the island from those of the new-comers. His armies, too, were more than a match for the whole united army, which by its frequent defeats were lessened in numbers and dispirited in courage. Their fleet, also, by Alfred's stratagem on the river Lea, was now lost to them. The citizens of London took possession of the ships in the Lea, whilst Alfred's army galloped westwards after the enemy: some of the best of the vessels were towed to London, others were destroyed, and the enemy's main dependence in all enterprises, their fleet, was entirely annihilated.

In the summer of 897, the army at Quatbridge broke up altogether: some of the soldiers retired to East-Anglia, some into Northumberland, and others, the most destitute, procured such ships as they could get, and crossed over sea to the mouth of the Seine in France. Long before this happened, we lose sight of Hasting, the principal of the Danish leaders: his object in coming to England, whatever it might have been, whether to gain for himself a kingdom, or simply to amass plunder, was clearly defeated by the superior talents of his great opponent. But we may not suffer ourselves to be deluded into an erroneous judgment on the nature and result of this campaign: if Alfred's star

was predominant over that of his baffled competitor, it was less the difference between the kings, than between the two systems of which they were the heroes : Alfred was the champion of a settled society, of equal rights, and of civilized life : Hasting represents the barbarian, who, roving over the world, and with no law but that of his sword, may inflict, for a time, the greatest woes upon mankind, but will assuredly fall at last, the victim of a ferocious system, which engulfs all that enter into it.

CHAP. XXV.

THE EAST ANGLIAN AND NORTHUMBRIAN DANES CONTINUE TO INFEST THE SOUTHERN COAST.—SEA FIGHT BETWEEN SIX DANISH AND NINE ENGLISH SHIPS NEAR THE ISLE OF WIGHT—TRANQUILLITY RESTORED TO ENGLAND—MORTALITY OF MEN AND CATTLE—ALFRED ENDS HIS DAYS IN PEACE ON THE 26TH OF OCTOBER, A D. 901.—CONCLUSION.

THE departure of the foreign Danes restored to the king the leisure of which their coming had deprived him; but though the main body of his enemies was dissipated, its fragmental parts were still dispersed throughout his dominions, principally around the coasts, where they perpetrated petty outrages, and alarmed the peaceable inhabitants. In East Anglia also and Northumberland, the surface of society continued to heave and swell, before the storm, which had agitated those countries, could subside. Their taste for plunder and their old habits of roving had been revived by the arrival of Hasting's army, and perhaps their minds had not been perfectly reconciled to the dominion of an Anglo-Saxon king. Hence we find, that the south of England still suffered from their piratical attempts, which the navy of Alfred now employed their leisure to repress.

One of these adventures has been recorded, and may serve as an instance of the predatory warfare in which the campaign of 893—897 terminated. "Six Danish ships," says the Saxon Chronicle, "came to land at the

Isle of Wight, where they did much damage, as well as in Devonshire and elsewhere on the sea-coast. The king then commanded nine of his ships^a to go thither, and these obstructed the passage from the port towards the outer sea. Three of the enemy's ships came out to meet the English ships, but the other three were lying dry at the upper end of the port, and their crews had gone ashore. The English then captured two of the three ships which came out against them, and killed all their crews: the third ship, after all its crew but five had been killed, effected its escape, because the English ships ran aground also. They were aground in a very disadvantageous manner, three of them being on the same side of the channel as the Danish, and the rest on the other side, so that neither party could assist the other. When the tide had ebbed several furlongs from the ships, the crews of the three Danish ships attacked those of the three English which were on the same side as themselves, and a combat ensued. They slew Lucumon the king's reeve, Wulfheard, Ebb, and Ethelhere, three Frisians, and Ethelferth the king's neatherd, and in all, of Frisians and English, they slew seventy-two men. Of the Danes a hundred and twenty were killed. After this the flood-tide came in and floated the Danish ships, so that they got out before the Christians could shove theirs off; but they were so damaged, that they could not row round the coast of Sussex, and the sea cast two of them ashore: their crews were carried to Winchester, and brought before the king, who commanded them to be hanged^b.

^a See page 277.

^b As pirates and rebels taken in arms, they deserved this sentence; which, however, the king could not have justly inflicted on the other Danes who came from abroad.

on the spot; the men who were in the third Danish ship escaped into East-Anglia, sorely wounded. That same summer, no less than twenty ships with their crews wholly perished on the south-coast of England."

It is manifest that these petty skirmishes, though attended with a fearful loss of life in proportion to the numbers engaged, could not endanger the throne of England, or materially interfere with the wise plans of her king. Neither had the invasion of Hasting, and the three years' war which followed it, done much real harm to the country which Alfred's care had so fully provided with defences. The anonymous writer, who has related the history of these times in the Saxon Chronicle, bursts into raptures at the conclusion of the war; but he tells us of another calamity which fell at this time more severely than that of arms upon the English people. "Thanks be to God," says he, "the army had not utterly broken down the English nation; but during the three years, it was much more broken down by the mortality among cattle and among men, and most of all by this, that many of the most eminent king's thanes in the land died during the three years; some of whom were, Swithulf, bishop of Rochester, and Ceolmund, alderman of Kent, Bertwolf, alderman of Essex, Wolfred, alderman of Hampshire, Elhard, bishop of Dorchester, Edwolf, the king's thane in Sussex, Bernwolf, governor of Winchester, Edwolf, the king's horse-thane, and many others besides these, though those I have named were the most distinguished."

It is therefore with a feeling of satisfaction, that we here close the narrative of the Danish invasion, until several generations had passed away, and they again attacked England, when there was no Alfred to defend it. Now then might we have hoped to accompany our

victorious king through a long and prosperous evening to a reign, whose morning had burst forth through clouds and storms into the splendour of so bright a day. Alfred was only forty-eight years old when the great Danish army at Quatbridge melted away like a mist before him. His mind was at the very height of intellectual vigour, and he might reasonably have looked forward to a long enjoyment of the blessings which his administration had procured for himself and people. But, alas, his tale has been told, and is finished! Alfred was one of those exalted spirits that can live no longer than the occasion which produced them. When the crisis which has called them into existence is over, they die, frequently from the exhaustion which the body, unable to follow the spirit in its soarings, has derived from a long and continued course of labour. Such was apparently the fate of Alfred. The three years, 898, 899, and 900, are passed over in silence by almost all the chroniclers. We then read in the same venerable record of Saxon antiquity which has principally guided us in our narrative, that "in the year 901 died Alfred, the son of Ethelwolf, six days before the Mass of All Saints, [Oct. 26.] He was king over the whole English nation, except that part which was under the dominion of the Danes^c."

^c "The year of his death is variously given. Matt. West. 350. Ing. 28. and Rad. Dic. 452. place it in 900. The Sax. Chron. 99, Malmsb. 46, Mailros 146, Florence 336, Petrib. Ch. 2, affix it to the year 901. So Hen. Silgrave, MSS. Cleop. A. 12. [edited by C. Hook, Lond. 1848,] and others. He was buried at Winchester, in the abbey he had founded there; but his remains were removed by Hen. I. to the new abbey in the meadows at Hyde, on the northern quarter of the city, and laid under the high altar. This building was destroyed at

He reigned thirty years and six months^d, during which the extent of his paternal kingdom became threefold what it had been before he came to the throne; the military, legislative, and judicial affairs of the country were improved under his administration to a degree which cast all former kings into the shade, and the navy of England, that most certain mode of defending it from foreign aggression, was entirely the offspring of his creative genius. Besides all this, it may be unhesitatingly asserted, that Alfred was the first poet, the first historian, and the first philosopher, which England for several hundred years produced: his inventions in all the mechanical arts were of the greatest use to his countrymen: he found the cities in ruins, and he left them newly built of hewn stone; he found his subjects ignorant, and he left them a studious and rising people: he taught them both morality and religion; and when at last, worn out in their service, at the early age of fifty-two he descended to the grave, he bequeathed them that best inheritance a king can give, the bright memory of himself, which has continued to guide them during the thousand years that since his birth are now on the point of expiring; and which for another thousand years, if the name of England shall last so long, will connect with it the name of ALFRED!

the Reformation, and what is left of Alfred's body now lies 'covered by modern buildings or buried in the ruins of the old.' Rev. C. Townshend's *Winchester*, p. 17." TURNER, vol. i. p. 599.

^d From Apr. 23, 851, to Oct. 26, 901.

APPENDIX.

1. KING ALFRED'S WILL*.

1. Ic Ælfred cinge, mid Godes gife, and mid getheahtunge Ætheredes ercebisceopes, and ealra West-Seaxena witenas gewitnesse, smeade imbe minre sawle thearfe, and imbe min irfe thæt me God and mine ildran forgeafon; and imbe thæt irfe thæt Athulf cinge min fæder us thrim gebrothrum becwæth, Athelbolde, and Ætherede, and me; and swilc ure swilce lengest wære thæt se fenge to eallum.

2. Ac hit gelamp thæt Æthelbold gefor; and wit, Æthered [und ic,] mid ealre West-Seaxena witenas gewitnesse, uncerne dæ lothfæstan Æthelbirhte cingce uncrum mæge, on

* King Alfred's Will was discovered in a MS. Register of the Abbey of Newminster, founded at Winchester by King Alfred not long before his death. This Register, which commemorated the foundation of the Abbey on the north-west side of Winchester Cathedral, and its subsequent removal about 1110 to Hyde, was probably written about the year 1030, or not more than 130 years after Alfred's death. The Register was in the possession of Mr. Astle in 1788, when the Will was first published in 4to, edited by the Rev Owen Manning, and printed at the Clarendon Press. The original text was accompanied with a Latin translation, a free English and a literal English translation. The Will has since been republished in 8vo. with the same literal English translation, a preface, and additional notes, London, 1828. It is here reprinted from the text of the last edition, but the English version has been made a little more literal, so as to be a more exact representation of the Anglo-Saxon idiom.

* A

tha gerædene the he hit eft gedide unc swa gefilde swa hit tha wæs tha wit him othfæstan. And he tha swa dide, ge thæt irfe, ge thæt he mid uncre gemanan begeat, and thæt he silf gestrinde.

3. Tha hit swa gelamp thæt Æthered to feng, tha bæd ic hine beforan urum witum eallum, thæt wit thæt irfe gedældon, and he me ageafe minne dæl. Tha sæde he me thæt he naht eathe ne mihte todælan, for thon he hæfde ful oft ær ongefangan: and he cwæth thæs the he on uncrum gemanan gebruce, and [thæs the he] gestrinde, æfter his dæge he nanum menn sel me uthe thonne me. And ic thæs tha wæs wel gethafa.

4. Ac hit gelamp thæt we ealle on hæthenum folce gebrocude wæron. Then spræce wit imbe uncre bearn, thæt hi sumre are bethorftan sælde unc on tham brocum swa unc sælde. Tha wæron we on gemote æt Swinbeorgum: tha gecwædon wit on West-Seaxena witenas gewitnesse, thæt swather uncer leng wære, thæt he ge-uthe othres bearnum thara landa the wit silfe begeaton, and thara land the unc Athulf cinge forgeaf be Athelbolde lifendum, butan tham the he us thrim gebrothrum gecwæth. And thæs uncor ægther othrum his wedd sealde swather uncer leng lifede, thæt se fenge ægther ge to lande, ge to madmum, and to eallum his æhtum, butan tham dæle the uncer gehwæther his bearnum becwæth.

5. Ac hit gelamp thæt Æthered cinge gefor, tha ne cidde me nan mann nan irfegewrit, ne nane gewitnesse, thæt hic ænig other wære butan swa wit on gewitnesse ær gecwædon. Tha gehirde we nu manegu irfe-geflitu. Nu tha lædde ic Athulfes cinges irfe-gewrit on ure gemot æt Langandene; and hit man arædde beforan eallum West-Seaxena witum. Tha hit aræd wæs, tha bæd ic hi ealle for minre lufan, (and him min wedd bead, thæt ic hira næfre nænne ne oncuthe for thon the hi on riht spræcon) and thæt hira nan ne wandode ne for minan lufan, ne for minum ege, thæt bi thæt folcriht arehton, thi læs ænig man cwethe thæt ic mine mægild, oththe ildran oththe

gingran, mid wô forðemde. And hi tha ealle to rihte gerehton and cwædon thæt hi nan rihtre riht gethencan ne mihtan, ne on tham irfe-gewrite gehiran. “Nu hit eall agân is thær on oth thine hand: thonne thu hit becwethe and sille swa geribre handa swa fremdre swather the leofre si.” And hi ealle me thæs hira wedd sealdon, and hira hand-setene, thæt be hira life hit nænig mann næfre ne onwende on nane othre wisan butan swa swa ic hit silf gecwethe æt tham nistan dæge.

6. Ic Ælfred, West-Seaxena cinge, mid Godes gife, and mid thisse gewitnesse, gecwethe hu ic imbe min irfe wille æfter minum dæge.

7. Ærest ic an Eadweade, minum ildran suna, thæs landes æt Stræt neat on Triconscire, and Heortigtunes, and tha bocland ealle the Leof heah hilt, and thæt land æt Carumtune, and æt Cilfantune, and æt Burnhamme, and æt Wedmor. And ic eom firmdig to tham hiwum æt Ceodre, thæt hi hine ceosan on tha gerad the we ær gecweden hæfdon; mid tham lande æt Ciwtune, and tham the thær to hirath. And ic him and thæs landes æt Cantuctune, and æt Bedewindan, and æt Pefesigge, and Hisseburnan, and æt Suttune, and æt Leodridan, and æt Aweltune.

8. And ealle tha bocland tha ic on Cent hæbbe, and æt tham Nither-Hisseburnan, and æt Ciseldene, agife man into Wintanceastre on tha gerad the hit min fæder ær gecwæth, and thæt min sundor feoh thæt ic Ecgulfe othfæste on tham Neotheran Hisseburnan.

9. And tham gingram minan suna thæt land æt Eaderingtune, and thæt æt Dene, und thæt æt Meone, and æt Ambres birig, and æt Deone, and æt Stureminster, and æt Gifle, and æt Cruærn, and æt Hwitancirican, and æt Axanmuthan, and æt Branecescumbe, and æt Columtune, and æt Twifirde, and æt Milenburnam, and æt Exanminster, and æt Sutheswirth, and æt Liwtune, and tha land the thær to hiran: thær sind ealle the ic on Wealcinne hæbbe butan Triconscire.

10. And minre ildstan dehter thæne ham æt Welewe.

11. And thære medemestan æt Clearan, and æt Cendefer.

12. And thære gingestan thone ham æt Welig, and æt Æscstune, and æt Cippanhamme.

13. And Æthelme mines brother suna thone tham æt Ealdingburnan, and æt Cumtune, and æt Crundellan and æt Beadingum, and æt Beadinga hænne, and æt Burnham, and æt Thunresfelda, and æt Æscengum.

14. And Athelwolde mines brother suna thone ham æt Godelmingum, and æt Gildeforda, and æt Stæningum.

15. And Osferthe minum mæge thone ham æt Beccanlea, and æt Hritheranfelda, and æt Diccelingum, and æt Suth-tune, and æt Lullingminster, and æt Angemaringum, and æt Felhhamme, and tha land the thær to hiran.

16. And Ealhsuith the thone ham æt Lamb burnan, and æt Waneting, and æt Ethandune.

17. And minum twam sunum an thusend punda, ægthrum fif hund punda.

18. And minre ildstan dehter, and thære medemestan, and thære gingestan, and Ealhsuith, him feowrum feower hund punda; ælcum an hund punda.

19. And minra ealdormanna ælcum an hund mangcusa, and Æthelme, and Athelwolde, and Ocfert he eac swa.

20. And Ætherede ealdormenn an sweord on hund teontigum mancsum.

21. And tham mannum the me folgiath, the ic nu on Eastertidum feoh sealde, twa hund punda: agife man him, and dæle man him betweoh, ælcum swa him togebirian wille, æfter thære wisan the ic him nu dælde.

22. And tham ercebisceope an hund mancusa, and Esne bisceope, and Wærferthe bisceope, and tham æt Scireburnan.

23. Eac swa gedæle for me, and for minne fæder, and for tha frind the he forthingode: and ic forethingie, twa hund punda, fiftig mæsse preostum ofer eall min rice, fiftig earmum Godes theowum, fiftig earmum thearfum, fiftig to thære cirican the ic æt reste. And ic nat naht gewislice hwæther thæs feos swa micel is; ne ic nat theah his mare si: butan swa ic wene. Gif hic mare si, beo hit him eallum gemæne

the ic feoh becweden hæbbe. And ic wille thæt mine ealdormenn and mine thenigmenn thær ealle mid sindan, and this thus gedælan.

24. Thonne hæfde ic ær on othre wisan awriten imbe min irfe, tha ic hæfde mare feoh, and ma maga, and hæfde monegum mannum tha gewritu othfæst, and on thas ilcan gewitnesse hi wæron awritene. Thonne hæbbe ic nu forbærned tha ealdan, the ic geahsian mihte. Gif hira hwile funden bith, ne forstent thæt naht: for tham ic wille thæt hit nu thus si mid Godes fultume.

25. And ic wille tha menn the tha land habbath, tha word gelæstan the on mines fæder irfe-gewrite standath swa swa hi firmest magon.

26. And ic wille, gif ic ænigum menn ænig feoh unleanod hæbbe thæt mine magas thæt huru geleanian.

27. And ic wille tha menn the ic mine bocland becweden hæbbe, thæt hi hit ne asillan of minum cinne, ofer heora dæg: ac ic wille [ofer] hira dæg thæt hit gange on tha nihstan hand me: butan hira hwile bearn hæbbe: thonne is me leofast thæt hit gange on thæt strined on tha wæpned healfe. Tha hwile the ænig thæs wirthe si. Min ildra fæder hæfde gecweden his land on tha spere healfe, næs on tha spinl healfe. Thonne, gif ic gesealde ænigre wif handa thæt he gestrinde, thonne forgildan mine magas, and gif hi hit be than libbendan habban willan: gif hit elles si, gange hit ofer hira dæg swa swa we ær gecweden hæfdon forthon ic cwethe thæt hi hit gildan. for than hi foth to minum the ic sillan mot swa wif handa swa wæpned handa swather ic wille.

28. And ic bidde on Godes naman, and on his haligra, thæt minra maga nan, ne irfewearða ne gespence nan. nænig cirelif thara the ic foregeald, and me West-Seaxena witan to rihte gerehton thæt ic hi mot lætan swa freo swa theore, swather ic wille: ac ic, for Godes lufan, and for minre sawle thearfe, wille thæt hi sin heora freolses wirthe, and hira cires: and ic on Godes lifendes naman beode thæt hi nan man ne

brocie, ne mid feos manunge, ne mid nænigum thingum, thaet hi ne motan ceosan swilcne mann swilce hi willan.

29. And ic wille thaet man agife tham hiwum at Domra hamme hira land-bec, and hira freols swilce hand to ceosenne swilce him leofast si, for me and for Æflæde, and for tha frind the heo forethingode, and ic forthingie.

30. And sec man eac on cwicum ceape imbe minre sawle thearfe, swa hit beon mæge and swa hit eac gefisne si, and swa ge me forgifan willan,

Translation.

1. I, Alfred King, with God's grace, and with counsel of Æthered^b archbishop, and all West-Saxon wise [*men*]'s^c witness, have thought about mine soul's health, and about mine inheritance, that me God and mine elders [ancestors] gave, and about that inheritance that Athulf^d, king mino father us three^e brothers bequeathed, Athelbolde, and Æthered, and me; and, which of us soever longest were, that he take to all,

2. But it happened that Æthelbold died^f; and we two, Æthered [and I]^g, with all West-Saxon wise [*men*]'s witness, our share entrusted to Æthelbirhte king our relation, on the condition that he it returned to us as entire as it there was, when we two it to him entrusted, and he then so did, both that

^b Ethelred, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died anno 888.

^c The words inclosed in brackets are supplied to make sense: the *witan* were the senate or parliament: witness means 'testimony' or 'concurrence.'

^d Ethelwolf, father of Alfred, died Jan. 13, anno 857-8, leaving four sons; 1. Ethelbald, 2. Ethelbert, 3. Ethered, 4. Alfred; who were successively kings of England; and one daughter, Ethelswith, who, anno 851, married Burghed, king of Mercia, and after his death, anno 873, became a nun at Padua, where she died anno 889.

^e King Ethelwolf made no mention in his will of his second son Ethelbert, as some suppose, because in his lifetime, (on the death of Athelstan unele of Ethelbert,) anno 851, he had given him the kingdom of the South Saxons, East Saxons, and Kent.

^f Dec. 20, anno 860.

inheritance, and that he with our joint concurrence got, and that he self acquired.

3. When it so happened that Æthered succeeded, then bade [prayed] I him before our wise [*men*] all, that we two that inheritance divide, and he me give mine share. Then said he me that he not easily nor might divide, for that he had full often ere [before] taken possession, and he quoth that which he of our joint concurrence enjoyed and [that which he]^ε acquired, after his days he to no man rather would give it than me, and I therewith then was well content.

4. But it happened that we all of heathen folk spoiled were. Then spake we two about our bairns, that they some support would require from us of those estates, as to us was given. Then were we in meeting at Swinburg: then declared we two, in West-Saxon wise [men]'s witness, that which soever of us longest were, that he give other's bairns these lands that we two self got, and those lands that to us Athulf king gave in Athelbolde's life-time; but [except] those that he us three brothers bequeathed. And of this, of us two either to other his pledge gave, whether of us longest lived, that he should take both to the land and to the treasures and to all his possessions, but that part that of us either to his bairns bequeathed.

5. But it happened that Æthered king died when nor shewed to me no man no inheritance-writing, nor no witness, that it any other was but as we two of witness ere [before] declared. Then heard we now many inheritance-suits: now then led I Athulf's king's inheritance-writing into our meeting at Langdene^h, and it they read before all West-Saxon wisemen. When it read was, then bade I them all for mine love, (and them mine pledge bade, that I of them never to none would bear ill will for that they of right speak,) and that of them

^ε Omitted in original, but necessary to the sense.

^h There are several places of the name of Langdon and Longdon; but which of them this was it is impossible to say. If this point should be settled, and the time at which the council was held, we could ascertain the date of the will, as well as the place at which it was made.

none would neglect, neither for mine love nor for mine fear, that they the folk-right declare, lest any man quoth [say] that I mine kinsfolk, either elder, either younger, with wrong exclude. And they then all for right declared and quothed [said] that they no rightier right conceive might nor in the inheritance-writing hear of. "Now it all delivered is there into thine hand: wherefore thou it bequeath and give as [well to] a relation as to a friend, whether to thee liefer¹ be." And they all me thereon their pledge gave, and their hand-setting, that by their life, it no man never pervert in none other wise, but so as I it self should say at the next day.

6. I, Alfred, West-Saxon King^j, with God's grace, and with this witness, declare how I about mine inheritance will after mine day.

7. First, I give^k to Edward mine elder son, the lands at Stræt-neat^l, in Triconshire^m, and Heortigtuneⁿ, and the book-land all that Leofheah holds, and that land at Carumtune^o, and at

¹ The comparative of *lief*, *liefer*, more agreeable.

^j Alfred being king at the time he made his will, it must have been made between A. D. 871, when he came to the crown, and A. D. 885, in which Bishop Esne, one of the legates therein mentioned, died.

^k I give—the lands &c.] Alfred describes most of the estates which he devises, as 'land,' but in some places he uses the word 'ham.' The latter word (the origiu of our home and hamlet) was used by the Anglo-Saxons for a house, farm, town, or village, and generally an abode or habitation. Somn. Dict.—Mr. Manning renders it '*manor*,' meaning, it is presumed, an entire township; for the word *manor*, if not the thing, is of Norman introduction.—But it is impossible to suppose that the numerous estates devised by Alfred to his two sons, as 'land,' did not comprehend manors in Mr Manning's acception of the term. It is much more likely that 'land' and 'ham' were considered by him synonymous, and that he in fact possessed an entire township in most, if not all, of the places which he mentions.

^l Probably Stratton in Cornwall.

^m Doubtlessly Cornwall; it being but a small Saxon variation from Trigshire, as it was called by the British inhabitants. See Borlase's Cornish vocabulary.

ⁿ Perhaps Hardington in the co. of Somerset, as most of the lands here bequeathed are in that county or Wilts.

^o Carhampton, in the co. of Somerset.

Cilfantune^p, and at Burnhamme^q, and at Wedmor^r, and I am a claimant to the families at Ceodre^s, that they him choose on the condition that we ere [formerly] expressed had; with the land at Ciwtune^t, and that that thereto belongeth. And I him give the lands at Cantuctune^u, and at Bedewind^v, and at Pefesigge^w, and Hysseburn^x, and at Suttune^y, and at Leodride^z, and at Aweltune^a.

And all the Book-lands that I in Cent have, and at the Nether-Hisseburn^d, and at Ciseldene^e, give they to Wintan-

^p Chilhampton, co. of Wilts.

^q Burnham, co. of Somerset.

^r Wedmore, co. of Somerset.

^s Cheddar, co. of Somerset. These families were the ceorls or churls, who occupied the tenemental lands there. They were so far analogous to those who in the succeeding feudal times were called privileged villains, as that they could not be compelled to hold their lands against their own consent. Hence it was that Alfred had stipulated with them, on the ground of a requisition on his part, to choose Edward, his son, to be their landlord, i. e. to continue his Tenants, after he himself should be dead and gone.

^t Chewton, co. of Somerset.

^u Quantock, co. of Somerset.

^v Beduin, co. of Wilts.

^w Pewsey, co. of Wilts.

^x Hussebourn, co. of Hants.

^y There are so many places in England of the name of Sutton, that it is hard to say which of them is here meant; but, doubtlessly, one of those of this name in Somerset or Wilts.

^z Probably Leathered, in Surrey.

^a Most probably Aulton in Wilts, which was given by some of his successors to the Cathedral of Winchester, Cart. 29 E. I. n. 54. For Aulton in Hants seems to have been given to that Church by Egbert, the grandfather of Alfred. Dug. Mon. i. 979. Yet Camden takes it for granted to have been Aulton in Hants; and following the printed Latin translation of the Will, says, that Alfred gave it to the keeper of Leodre. Edit. Gibs. p. 146.

^d Nether Hussebourne in Hants; which was afterwards given by Edward to the Cathedral at Winchester.

^e Chiseldon or Chistleton in Wilts; which was given to the old Foundation at Winchester for the present; but, as it seems, for the benefit of his intended New Minster, at that place, which appears to have been possessed of it in 4 Ed. III. Rom. 4. E. 3. m. 4. apud Tann. Notit. p. 156.

ceastre, on the condition that it mine father ere gave, and that mine sundry fee [estate] that I Ecgulf gave in trust at the Nether Hisseburn.

And the younger mine son^e that land at Eaderingtune^g, and at Dene^g, and at Meone^h, and at Ambresburyⁱ, and at Deone^h, and at Stureminsterⁱ, and at Gifle^m, and at Cruærnⁿ, and at Whitchurch^o, and at Axanmouth^p, and at Brancescumbe^q, and at Columtune^r, and at Twyford^s, and at Milenburn^t, and at Exanminster^u, and at Sutheswerthe^x, and at Liwtune^r, and the lands that thereto belong, that are all that I in Weal-district^z have, except Triconshire.

^e Ethelward.

^g Adrington, co. of Somerset.

^z There are places of this name both in Hants and Wilts, as well as in many other counties. But I take it to have been in one of those two, as most of the estates here bequeathed lay amongst the West Saxons.

^h East and West-Meon, co. of Hants.

ⁱ Ambresbury, co. of Wilts.

^k Down, co. of Dorset, or Devon.

^l Sturminster, co. Dorset.

^m Gidley, co. Devon.

ⁿ Crewkerne, co. Somerset.

^o Whitchurch, co. Hants.

^{p q r} Axmouth, Branscomb, Columbton, co. Devon.

^s Twyford, co. Hants.

^t Milbourn, co. Dorset or Somerset.

^u Axminster, co. Devon.

^x Of this I find nothing.

^y Litten, of which name there is one in Dorset, and one in Somerset.

^z "ON WEALCYNNE." The author of the printed translation has rendered this "sub cælo;" as if Alfred had meant to say, 'under the Welkin.' But besides that this word is always written, in the Saxon language, 'weolcen', 'wolcen', or 'welcn,' the very termination, 'cynne,' naturally refers us to some district. The only question is, what that district was? Now the Britons, who retired into the West of England, were called by our Saxon ancestors, 'wealas,' and their tribes, 'weala cynne,' i. e. 'Britannorum gentes.' The word indeed is, at present, retained in the name of those only who retired to the extremity of the island; who are to this day called 'Cornwealas.' But this does not preclude the possibility of its having formerly extended further. And the prefix, 'Corn,' applied to one set of the 'wealas,' seems to imply that there were other 'wealas' besides these, and bordering on them. Accord-

And mine eldest daughter^a, the ham at Welewe^a.

And the midmost^b at Cleare^c, and at Cendefer^d.

And the youngest^e, the ham at Welig^f, and at Æscetune^g, and at Cippanhamme^h.

And Æthelmeⁱ, mine brother's son, the ham at Ealdingburn^j, and at Cumtune^k, and at Crundell^l, and at Beading^m, and at Beadinghammeⁿ, and at Burnham^o, and at Thunresfeld^p, and at Æsceng^r.

ingly I suppose that, by a latitude peculiar to common speech, the inhabitants of Devon, or even of Somersetshire, might be called 'wealas' also: and that, therefore, when Alfred had bequeathed his estates in these parts, he finished with saying, 'thæt sind ealle the ic on weal-cynne hæbbe butan Triconscire:' i. e. as we should express it now, "which are all I have in the West of England except in Cornwall." And, as a proof of this, it is observable, that none of the lands hereafter bequeathed are farther west than Wiltshire.

^a Ethelfleda.

^a Wellow, co. of Hants.

^b His 'midmost daughter' was Ethelgeda, the Nun.

^c King's Clere, co. of Hants.

^d Probably one of those places in Hampshire which still bear this addition to their name, viz. Preston Candever, Chilton Candever.

^e His youngest daughter was Elfrida, who married Baldwin II. earl of Flanders, and dying on June 7, 929, was buried in the monastery of St. Peter at Ghent.

^f Willey, co. of Wilts.

^g Ashton, co. of Wilts.

^h Chippenham, co. of Wilts.

ⁱ Æthelm, the eldest son of King Ethelbert, elder brother of Alfred.

^j Aldingbourn, co. of Sussex.

^k Compton, co. of Sussex.

^l Crundal, co. of Hants.

^m Beden, co. of Sussex.

ⁿ Bedingham, co. of Sussex.

^o Barnham, co. of Sussex.

^p I take this to have been the manor of Thunderfield, in the parish of Horsey, near Reygate in Surrey, where was formerly a castle of considerable strength.

^r Probably Eashing in the parish of Godalming in Surrey, the manor of which also belonged to Alfred.

And Athelwolde^a, mine brother's son, the ham at Godelming^c, and at Gildeford^a, and at Stæning^x.

And to Osferth^y my cousin, the ham at Beccanlea^z, and Hritheranfeld^a, and at Dicceling^b, and at Suthtune^c, and at Lullingminster^d, and at Angmæring^e, and at Felhhamme^f, and the lands that thereto belong.

And to Ealhswith^g, the ham at Lamburn^h, and at Wane-tingⁱ, and at Ethandune^k.

17. And to mine two sons a thousand pounds, to each five hundred pounds.

18. And to mine eldest daughter, and to the midmost, and to the youngest, and to Ealhswithe, to them four, four hundred pounds, to each a hundred pounds.

19. And to mine Aldermen^l, to each a hundred mancuses^m, and to Æthelm, and Athelwolde, and Osferthe, eke so.

* The youngest son of King Ethelbert, who died in arms against his cousin Edward, the son and successor of Alfred, anno 905.

^a Godalming and Guildford, both in Surrey.

^x Steyning in Sussex.

^y Who this Osferth his cousin was I cannot find out.

^z Beckley, Rotherfield, and Dichling, all in Sussex.

^c Sutton, Lullington, Angmering, and Felphame, all in Sussex.

^g Ethelswitha, the wife of Alfred, and daughter of Ethelred the Great, earl of Mercia. She survived.

^h Lamburn and Wantage in Berks, at the latter of which places Alfred was born.

^k Edingdon, near Westbury in Wilts, where Alfred defeated the Danes in 878.

^l The king's aldermen were his Justices itinerant, and other great officers of his own appointment.

^m Mr. Manning says, the "mancus was about 7s. 6d. of our present currency." This may be correct; but the precise grounds of every valuation of ancient money in modern currency should be stated. Mr. Turner, in his *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, vol. ii. p. 493. (6th. edit.) quotes a passage from Elfric, which asserts, that five pennies made one shilling, and thirty pennies one mancus. This, as he observes, 'would make the mancus six shillings,' which is not very far from its value in 'present currency,' according to Mr. Manning's calculation. But it must be recollected, that these were Anglo-Saxon pennies and shillings, the relative

20. And to Æthered alderman a sword of a hundred mancuses.

21. And to the men that me follow, that I now at Easter-tide fees gave, two hundred pounds: let them give to them, and divide them between, to each as to him to belong they shall judge; after the manner that I to them now have distributed.

22. And to the archbishop^a, a hundred mancuses, and to Esny^o bishop, and to Werferthe^p bishop, and to the [bishop] at Sherborne^q.

23. Eke so let them distribute for me, and for mine father, and for the friends that he forethought for, and I forethink for, two hundred pounds; fifty to the Mass-priests over all mine kingdom, fifty to God's poor servants, fifty to the distressed poor; fifty to the Church that I at rest [rest at]. And I know not certainly whether fees [money] so much is, nor I know but that thereof more may be: but so I ween [think]. If it more be, be it to them all common

value of which to commodities was very different from that of our modern pence and shillings. Mr. Turner supposes that two sorts of pennies were the only coins of the Anglo-Saxons above their copper coinage; and that all their other denominations of money (including the mancus) are to be regarded as "weighed or settled quantities of uncoined metal."

^a Ethelred, archbishop of Canterbury, who died anno 888.

^o Esne, bishop of Hereford, who died, according to Godwin, anno 885. Stevens and Willis place him a century higher. But, as a bishop Esne is here expressly mentioned as a legate, and no other of that name occurs in the whole catalogue of bishops, this seems a full proof that Godwin is right in the point of chronology.

^p Werferth was bishop of Worcester, a man of singular learning, and employed by Alfred in translating the Dialogues of Pope Gregory I. into the Saxon language. He died, according to some, anno 911; according to others, anno 915.

^q The bishop of Sherborne was Asser, the great friend and favourite of Alfred; he wrote the Annals of that monarch's reign down to the year 893. He died, according to the most probable accounts, anno 909, or 910. See Fra. Wise de vitâ et scriptis Asserij, §. 12. prefixed to his edition of Asser's Annals of Alfred.

that I fee [money] bequeathed have. And I will that my aldermen and my ministers there all together be, and this thus distribute.

24. When had I ere [formerly] in other wise written concerning mine inheritance, then I had more fee, and more relations, and had to many men the writings intrusted, and in [before] the same witnesses they were written. Then have I now burned those old [*deeds*] that I recover might. If of these any found should be, let it stand for nothing: for that I will that it now thus be with God's help.

25. And I will the men that land have, the words to list that in mine father's inheritance-writing stand, so as they firmest [soonest] may.

26. And I will, if I to any men any fee unpaid have, that mine relations that at least repay.

27. And I will the men to whom I my book-land bequeathed have, that they it not give from mine kin, over [after]^a their day, that it go unto the highest-hand to me; unless of them any one bairns have; then it is to me most eligible that it go to that issue on the male side, the while that any of it worthy be. Mine elder father [grandfather] hath bequeathed his land to the spear-half, and not to the spindle-half^b. Wherefore if I have given to any female what he had acquired, then let redeem it my relations if they it while she is living have will: if it otherwise be, let it go after their day, so as we before determined have. For this reason I ordain that they it pay for, because they will

^a The word 'ofer' appears to have been omitted in the original.

^b "Spere-healfe . . . spinl-healfe." The sexes are here denominated from the implements peculiar to their respective occupations; the male from the spear, the female from the spindle. Hence I think it probable that the word 'wæpened,' signifying also masculine, (though derived by the authors of our vocabularies from 'wæpen,' which they suppose to have been a Saxon word corresponding to the 'veretrum' of the Latins,) has its origin in the word 'wæpen,' as it signifies arms; and it is therefore only applied to the male sex, as the particular weapon the spear was, because it was the sex that bore arms.

succeed to my [estate] that I give may, or to female hand, or to male hand whether I will.

28. And I beseech in God's name, and in his Saints', that of my relations none, nor of my heirs none, do obstruct none of the freedom^p of those that I have redeemed. And for me the West-Saxon nobles as lawful have pronounced that I them may leave either free either or bond whether I will. But I for God's love, and for my soul's advantage, will that they be of their freedom masters, and of their will, and I, in God the living's name intreat that them no man do not disturb, neither by money-exaction, nor by no manner of means^r, that they may not choose such man as they will.

29. And I will that they restore to the families^r at Domerham^s their land-deeds and their free liberty such person to choose, as to them most agreeable may be; for me, and for Elfleda^t, and for the friends that she did intercede for, and I do intercede for.

30. And seek^u they also, with a living price^x, for my soul's health, as it be may, and as it also fitting is; and as ye me to forgive shall be disposed.

^p The latter part of this compound 'lif' is put for 'leaf:' and the whole word 'cyrelif' is as much as to say, "arbitrii licentiam," that is, the liberty of disposing of themselves.

^r Alfred, having manumitted divers 'theowas' and put them into the condition of 'ceorles,' desires that his heirs would not abridge them of that liberty, but leave them to choose such man for their landlord as they wished; which all 'ceorles,' by the Saxon constitution, might do.

^s The 'hiwas' of Domerham were the same sort of people as those of Chedder spoken of in a former note, namely, the 'ceorles' who occupied the tenemental lands there which they might relinquish when they pleased. And as they were entreated, in that instance, to choose Edward for their Lord, i. e. to continue to occupy those lands under him, as they had done under Alfred: so here, the heirs are required to leave those of Domerham to choose such man for their landlord as they would; i. e. to continue to occupy those lands, or relinquish them, as they should think proper.

^t 'Domra hamme,' the manor of Dummer, in the co. of Hants.

^u His eldest daughter.

^x 'Sec man.' "Let them seek," or make application to, viz. God.

^y 'On cwicum ceape.' With a living price; viz. by prayer and intercession, and the usual offices of devotion.

II. KING ALFRED'S PROVERBS, GIVEN AT SHIFFORD A.D. 890.

From an ancient Anglo-Saxon Manuscript, formerly in the Cottonian Library, and quoted by Spelman in his *Life of Alfred*; but now supposed to be lost.

AT Sifford seten thaines manie,
 Fele biscopes, and fele boclered,
 Erles prude, cnihtes egloche.
 There was erle Alfric, of the lage swuth wise;
 And ec Alfred, Engle-hirde, Engle-derling.
 On Engelond he was king: hem he gan leren
 Swo hi heren mihten, hu hi here lif leden scolden.

ALFRED he was on Engelond a king wel swithe strong;
 He was king and clerk: wel he luvede God's werk:
 He was wise on his word, and war on his speche;
 He was the wisest man that was on Engelond.

THUS qwath Alvred, Engle frofre,
 "Wolde ye nu liben and lusten yure louerd,
 And he yu wolde wisen wiseliche thinges,
 Hu ye mihten werlds wurthscipe welden,
 And ec yure soule samne to Criste."
 Wise weren the cwethen the saide the king Alfred!
 "Mideliche I mune yu, mine dere frend, arme
 And edilede luvende, that ye all drede yure
 Drihten Christ, luvierend him and licen; for he is
 Louerd of Life; he is one God over all godnesse;
 He is one blisse over alle blessedness;
 He is one manne, milde maister; he one folce fader,
 And frofre: he is one riht wis and riche king,
 That him ne scal be pane noht of his will
 Hwo him here on werlde wurthend and eth."

THUS cwath Alvred, Engle frofre,
 "He mai no riht cing ben under Crist self,
 But he be boclered, and wis o loage,

And he hise writes wel icweme, and he cunne
Letres locen himselve hu he scal his lond
Lagelice helden."

THUS cwath Alvred, Engle frofre :
" The erl and the atheling tho ben under the cing,
The lond to leden mid lagelic deden.
Bothe the clerc and the cniht demen evenliche riht :
For after that the man soweth,
Thereafter he scal mowen ;
And efrilces mannes dom to his ogen dure charigeth."

THUS cwath Alvred, " The cniht behoveth
Ceneliche to mowen vor to werce the lond
Of hunger, and of heregong,
That the Chureche have grith, and the chirl be in frith,
His sedes to sowen, hise medes to mowen,
His plowes to driven to ure alre bilif.
This is the cnihtes lage, to locen that it wel fare, &c.

Translation.*

AT Shifford sat thanes many,
Many bishops, and many book-learned [men],
Earls wise and knights awful.
There was earl Alfric, of the law so wise,
And eke Alfred, England's herd ['s-man], England's darling ;
In England he was king ; them he began [to] learn,
So him they might hear, how they their life should lead.

ALFRED, he was in England a king well so strong.
He was king and clerk : well he loved God's work.
He was wise in his word, and wary in his speech.
He was the wisest man that was in England.

* As far as the original is given, I have translated it afresh, more literally than the version which Spelman has given. The remainder is Spelman's free translation.

THUS quoth Alfred, England's darling :
" Would ye now live and long after your Lord !
And He would you [make to] know wise things,
How you might world's worship obtain.
And eke your souls unite to Christ !"
Wise were the quotations that said the king Alfred.
Mildly I mind you, my dear friend, poor
And rich, loving, that ye all dread your
Lord Christ, love Him and like, for He is
Lord of life : he is one God over all goodness.
He is one bliss over all blessedness.
He is one man, mild master : He one folk's father [common
father],
And darling : He is one right wise and rich King,
That him not shall fail naught of his will
Who Him here in world worship and honour."

THUS quoth Alfred, England's comfort.
" He may no right king be under Christ's self,
But [unless] he be book-learned, and wise of law,
And he his writs well know, and he can
Letters look himself, how he shall his land
Lawfully hold."

THUS quoth Alfred, England's comfort :
" The earl and the atheling too be under the king,
The land to lead with lawful deed ;
Both the clerk and the knight with evenly right :
For after that the man soweth,
Thereafter he moweth ;
And every man's doom to his own door cometh."

THUS quoth Alfred : " The knight behoveth
Cunningly to mow for to work the land
Of hunger, and of death,
That the Church have grith [*quiet*], and the churl be in
frith [*freedom*],
His seeds to sow, his meads to mow,

His ploughs to drive to our all behoof:
This is the knight's law to look that it well fare."

So far the translation is equivalent to the original. Of that which follows, Spelman has not given the original.

THUS quoth Alfred: "Without wisdom wealth is worth little. Though a man had an hundred and seventy acres sown with gold, and all grew like corn, yet were all that wealth worth nothing, unless that of an enemy one could make it become his friend. For what differs gold from a stone, but by discrete using of it?"

THUS quoth Alfred: "A young man must never give himself to evil, though good befalls him not to his mind, nor though he enjoys not every thing he would: for Christ can when He will give good after evil and wealth after grace. Happy is he that is made for it."

THUS quoth Alfred: "A wise child is the blessing of his father. If thou hast a child, while it is little, teach it the precepts that belong to a man; and when it is grown up it will follow them; then shall thy child become such as shall recompense thee; but if thou lettest him go after his own will, when he cometh to age it will grieve him sore, and he shall curse him that had the tuition of him: then shall thy child transgress thy admonition, and it would be better for thee that thou hadst no child; for a child unborn is better than one unbeaten."

THUS quoth Alfred: "If thou growest into age, hast wealth, and canst take no pleasure, nor hast strength to govern thyself, then thank thy Lord for all that he hath sent thee, for thy own life, and for the day's light, and for all the pleasures he hath made for man; and whatsoever becometh of thee, say thou, come what come will, God's will be welcome."

THUS quoth Alfred: "Worldly wealth at last cometh to the worms and all the glory of it to dust, and our life is soon gone. And though one had the rule of all this middle world,

and of the wealth in it; yet could he keep his life but a short while. All thy happiness would but work thy misery, unless thou couldst purchase thee Christ. Therefore, when we lead our lives as God hath taught us, we then best serve ourselves. For then be assured that He will support us; for so said Salomon, that wise man; Well is he that doeth good in this world, for at last he cometh where he findeth it."

Thus quoth Alfred: "My dear son, set thee now beside me, and I will deliver thee true instructions. My son, I feel that my hour is coming. My countenance is wan. My . . . My days are almost done. We must now part. I shall to another world, and thou shalt be left alone in all my wealth. I pray thee (for thou art my dear child) strive to be a father and a lord to thy people, be thou the children's father and the widow's friend, comfort thou the poor and shelter the weak; and with all thy might, right that which is wrong. And, son, govern thyself by law, then shall the Lord love thee, and God above all things shall be thy reward. Call thou upon Him to advise thee in all thy need, and so He shall help thee the better to compass that which thou wouldest."

NO. III. DESCRIPTION OF ALFRED'S GEM.

(See Frontispiece.)

THE author of this work has been kindly permitted to insert, by way of frontispiece, an Engraving of a beautiful Gem, formerly worn by King Alfred, and now preserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. The Engraving was made by order of the Rev. Dr. Silver, to embellish a small volume which that Gentleman published several years ago on the "Coronation Service, or Consecration of the Anglo-Saxon Kings, as it illustrates the Origin of the Constitution, by the Rev. Thomas Silver, D.C.L. of St. John's College, Oxford; formerly Anglo-Saxon Professor. Oxford, printed by W. Baxter, for J. Parker; and J. Murray, London. 1831."

The same author, in a "Letter to the Duke of Marlborough and the Right Hon. Baron Churchill, Lay-Rectors of the manor and parish of Charlbury, on the sacrilege and impolicy of the forced Commutation of Tithes, &c. Oxford 1842," has made some further observations on the subject, modifying the explanation which he had given of the Gem in the former work. The Gem is also engraved in the *Marmora Oxoniensia*, and in Gough's *Camden*, vol. i. p. 97; but both these representations are infinitely inferior to the exact delineation of it which forms our frontispiece. The main substance or setting of the Gem is of pure gold, containing coloured stones, cased in a remarkably thick crystal, and, though manufactured nearly a thousand years ago, it is in perfect preservation, and only looks a little dull and dingy for the great length of time that has passed over it. The length of the Gem is about two inches, and it is about half an inch thick. Round the edge are engraved the words **ALFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN**, *Alfred had me worked*, in pierced gold letters. The narrow end of the Gem, at which the first and last words of this inscription meet, is formed into the head of a griffin, the national emblem of the Saxons, having in its mouth a strong gold rivet, to which a chain was doubtlessly attached; and its flat form indicates that it must have been worn on the breast dependent from the chain that passed round the neck, in a way similar to ornaments which are still worn by kings and queens on state occasions.

The back of the Gem is quite flat, and ornamented with a flower, wrought in gold, without stones.

The front or principal face of the relic is smaller than the back, in consequence of the edge sloping inwards a little all round, so that the words engraved on it do not stand upright, a contrivance probably adopted, for the purpose of giving more effect to the front of the jewel, and making it stand out in stronger relief. The back-ground is composed of a blue stone, on which appears a human figure clothed in the green Saxon military vest or tunic, and girt with a belt, from which a strap

for a sword depends towards the left side. The figure is seated on the throne, with a cyne-helm or crown on its head, and on either hand he holds a sceptre, branching out, over the shoulders, into fleurs de lis. Dr. Hickes, in his *The-saurus*, [vol. i. p. 144.]* expresses his doubt whether the figure may have been intended to represent Jesus Christ, or St. Cuthbert, who was a patron of King Alfred, and is said in an old legend^b to have assisted him in his distress. On this subject Dr. Silver observes, "I thought formerly, that the figure in the Gem was a type of Alfred's office as king; but I am now convinced, that the figure itself is that of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding that it is clothed in the military vest of the Saxons; for it was the custom of those times to draw characters in their own dresses. The position of the image is founded on a passage in the 45th Psalm, verse 3, and which is still retained in the present Coronation Service; where the Bishop says, 'Remember of whom it is said, Gird thyself with thy sword upon thy thigh; O thou most Mighty.'

"This is therefore our Saviour, the belt of the sword being seen surmounted with fleur de lis. Our Saviour, as the Melchizedec, carries the double Sceptre, one on each shoulder, the long Sceptre representing the invisible Church in heaven, the shorter that on earth; both are surmounted with fleur de lis, or lilies, and both Sceptres meet at a given point. Alfred was the first sovereign who was crowned with the Tithe inherent in it, as attached to the order of Melchizedec. As the Anglo-Saxon Kings and also the Normans considered themselves as the Gespelia or messengers of Christ, or the Vicarii Christi in terra, Alfred, under these impressions of his state, ordered this image of our Saviour to be made, and He wore it round his neck, from which probably it dropped.

"Connecting this picture of Christ as the Melchizedec,

* See also Musgrave, *Phil. Trans.* p. 247. *Geta Brit.* 1716, and *Wise's Asser, Vita Alf.* p. 171.

^b See page 227 of the present work.

the Tithe of the King as the Vicarius Christi in terra, the ancient Coronation Service of the Anglo-Saxon Kings, the laws of Alfred, and his reference in them to the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, we may collect from the circumstances, that Alfred considered that the Tithe had been granted by himself, the State, and the landholders, to the invisible Melchizedec in heaven, and that the Crown power was the great trustee of the rights which all parties held on them."

Notwithstanding these observations, and the weight which must always attach to the opinion of one so well versed in Anglo-Saxon Literature; the opinion which Dr. Silver first promulgated, that the figure was an image of the king himself, and symbolical of the kingly office, seems quite as tenable as the other. According to this view, the two sceptres would aptly designate the spiritual and temporal authorities, which were united in the king's hands.

NO. IV. TREATY BETWEEN ALFRED AND GUTHRUM.

Ælfredes and Guthrumes frith^c.

THIS is thæt frith thæt Ælfred cynincg and Gythrum cynincg, and ealles Angel-cynnes witan, and eal seo theod the on East-Englum beoth ealle gecweden habbath, and mid athum gefeostnod for hy sylfe and for heora gingran ge for geborene ge for ungeborene the Godes miltse recceoththe ure.

1. Ærest ymb ure land-gemæra, up on Temese, and thonne up on Ligan, and andlang Ligan oth hire æ-wylum. thonne on gerihte to Bedanforda. thonne up on Usan oth Wætlingastræt.

^c For the translation of this document, see the text of the Life of Alfred, page 244.

2. Thæt is thonne gif man ofslagen weorthe, ealle we lætath efen dyrne, Engliscne and Deniscne, to eoht healf-marcum asodenes goldes. buton tham ceorle the on gafollande sit and heora liesingum tha syndan eac even dyre ægther to twa hund scillinga.

3. And gif mon cyninges thegn beteo man-slihtes, gif he hine ladian dyrre. do he thæt mid xii cininges thegnum. Gif man thone man betyhth the bith læssa maga thone se cyninges thegn. ladige he hine mid xi his gelicena, and mid anum cyninges thægne. And swa ægehwilcre spræce the mare sy thone IIII mancussas. And gyf he ne dyrre gylde hit thry-gylde swa hit man gewyrthe.

Be Getymum.

4. And thæt ælc man wite his getyman be mannum, and be horsum, and be oxum.

5. And ealle we cwædon on tham dæge the mon tha athas swor. thæt ne theowe ne freo ne moton in thone here faran butan leafe. ne heora nan the ma to us. Gif thonne gebyrige thæt for neode heora hwilc with ure bige habban wille. oththe we with heora mid yrfe and mid æhtum thæt is to thafianne on tha wisan thæt man gislas sylle frithe to wedde and to swutulunge thæt man wite thæt man clæne bæc hæbbe.

NO. V. EPISTOLA FULCONIS RHEMORUM ARCHIEPISCOPI
AD ALFREDUM REGEM.

Gloriosissimo ac Christianissimo Regi Anglorum Alfredo, Folco gratia Dei Remorum archiepiscopus ac servorum Dei famulus, et temporalis regni sceptrum semper victricia, et cœlestis imperii gaudia sempiterna.

Primum quidem gratias agimus Domino Deo nostro Patri Luminum et Auctori omnium bonorum, a quo est omne

datum optimum et omne donum perfectum : qui per gratiam Spiritus Sancti non solum splendescere in corde vestro voluit lumen suæ cognitionis, verum etiam accendere dignatus est ignem sui amoris ; quo illustrati pariter et accensi, et regni vobis cœlitus commissi strenue administratis utilitatem, bellicis armis (cum divino adjutorio) illius exquirendo vel tuendo pacem ; et ecclesiastici ordinis (mente religiosa instante desiderando) spiritualibus armis amplificare sublimitatem. Unde supernam clementiam indefessis precibus exoramus, ut ipse, qui prævenit et accendit ad hoc cor vestrum, efficiat vos compotem voti replendo in bonis desiderium vestrum ; quatinus in diebus vestris et pax regno ac genti vestræ multiplicetur, et ecclesiasticus ordo (qui in multis, ut dicitis, sive frequenti irruptione vel impugnatione Paganorum, seu vetustate temporum, vel incuria Prælatorum, vel ignorantia subditorum collapsus est) per vestram diligentiam et industriam quantocius reparetur, nobilitetur, ac dilatetur.

Et quum per nostrum adjutorium id potissimum fieri desideratis, et a nostra sede, cui beatus Remigius Francorum utique apostolus præsidet, hinc consilium ac patrocinium quæritis, non sine divino instinctu hoc credimus actum : ut sicut olim gens Francorum per eundem beatum Remigium liberari a multimodo errore et unius veri Dei cultum meruit cognoscere, sic gens Anglorum ex sede illius et doctrina talem deposcat suscipere, per quem superstitiosa cavere, superflua resecare, ac noxia quæque inolita consuetudine ac more barbarico pullulancia noverit extirpare ; et per agrum Dominicum ambulantes discant flores legere et anguem cavere.

Augustinus etenim Sanctus vestræ gentis primus episcopus a beato Gregorio apostolo vestro vobis directus, nec omnia decreta apostolicarum sanctionum potuit in brevi demonstrare, nec rudem ac barbaram gentem voluit subito novis et incognitis legibus onerare ; noverat enim infirmitate illorum consulere, atque cum Apostolo dicere tanquam parvulis in Christo, *Lac vobis potum dedi non escam*. Et quemadmodum

Petrus et Jacob, qui videbantur columnæ esse, cum Barnaba et Paulo cæterisque senioribus congregatis, ecclesiam primitivam de gentibus ad fidem Christi confluentem noluerunt graviore jugo onerare, nisi ut præciperent eos abstinere ab immolatis, fornicatione, suffocato et sanguine: ita et primitus in vobis gestum esse cognoscimus.

Quin et rudimenta barbaricæ feritatis ad divinam cognitionem enutrienda, hoc solo indigebant; et servi fideles atque prudentes, super familiam Domini constituti, conservis suis in tempore, hoc est, pro captu audientium, mensuram tritici bene erogare noverant. Ac successu temporis crescente religione Christiana, sancta Ecclesia his contenta esse nec voluit nec debuit: sed sumpta forma ab ipsis apostolis magistris et fundatoribus suis qui post evangelicam doctrinam ab ipso cœlesti magistro propagatam atque diffusam, non superfluum et inutile sed commodum et salubre duxerunt suarum epistolarum crebris commonitionibus fideles perfectius instituere, et in vera fide solidius confirmare, tramitemque vivendi et normam religionis eis abundantius contradere.

Nihilominus et ipsa, sive adversis exercitata sive prosperis enutrita, nunquam cessavit utilitatem filiorum, quos quotidie Christo parturit, exquirere, eorumque profectum sive privatim sive publice, igne Spiritus Sancti inflammata, augmentare. Hinc sunt consilia non solum ex vicinis civitatibus vel provinciis, sed etiam ex transmarinis regionibus totiens contracta, hinc synodalia decreta sæpius edita, hinc sacri canones sancto Spiritu conditi et consecrati, quibus et fides catholica maxime roboratur, et ecclesiasticæ pacis unitas inviolata custoditur, necnon ordo illius honeste disponitur: quos equidem sicut transgredi omni Christiano illicitum est, sic ignorare maxime clericis et sacerdotibus omnino nefarium est: quorum salubris observatio et religiose semperque amplexanda traditio, quum, propter causas superius memoratas apud gentem vestram, aut non pleniter innotuit, aut ex maxima jam parte refriguit, optimo consilio et ut credimus divinitus inspirato vestræ dominationi ac regali prudentiæ

visum ac placitum fuit, et nostram parvitatem super hoc consulere et beati Remigii sedem expetere, cujus meritis atque doctrina eadem sedes, ut ecclesia super omnes ecclesias Galliarum, ex ejus temporibus omni religione et doctrina semper floruit et excelluit. Et quum talia a nobis quæsituri ac petitori, noluistis quasi immunes et manu vacua apparere, dignata est vestra regia dominatio nos maximo munere, et necessario multum tempori, et congruo satis rei de qua agitur, honorare: super qua re et supernam providentiam admirantes nimium laudavimus, et vestræ regiæ munificentiae grates non modicos retulimus.

Misistis siquidem nobis licet generosos et optimos tamen corporales atque mortales canes ad abigendam rabiem visibilium luporum, quibus, inter cætera flagella justo Dei judicio nobis illata, plurimum abundat patria nostra: quærentes a nobis et ipsi canes non corporales sed spirituales, non tales videlicet qualibus exprobrat Propheta dicens, *Canes multi, non valentes latrare*, sed de qualibus dicit Psalmista, *Lingua canum tuorum ex inimicis, ab ipso*. Qui utique noverint et idonei sint pro Domino suo magnos latratus fundere, et gregem illius vigilantissimis ac sagacissimis excubiis jugiter custodire, cruentissimosque lupos immundorum spirituum, qui sunt insidiatores ac devoratores animorum, procul arcere; de quorum numero unum a nobis specialiter deposcitis nomine Grimbaldum sacerdotem et monachum, ad hoc officium destinandum, et curæ pastoralis regiminis præficiendum: cui utique testimonium perhibet universa ecclesia, quæ eum ab ineunte ætate nutrit in vera fide et sancta religione, et quæ illum per singulos gradus ecclesiastico more promovit usque ad sacerdotii dignitatem, dignissimum esse illum proclamans Pontificali honore, et idoneum qui possit et alios docere: sed quum id in nostro regno magis fieri optabamus, et olim Christo annuente opportunitate temporis adimplere disponebamus (scilicet ut quem habebamus filium fidelem, haberemus et ministerii nostri consortem et in omni utilitate ecclesiastica fidissimum adiutorem), non sine ingenti, ut ita dixerimus,

dolore patimur illum a nobis divelli, et per tanta spatia terrarum ac maris, a nostris obtutibus separari.

Porro autem quia caritas non novit dispendium, nec fides detrimentum, nullaue intercludunt intervalla terrarum quos copulat veræ dilectionis vinculum, libentissime vestræ petitioni annuimus, quibus nihil negare possumus, neque eum vobis invidemus, quorum profectu sicut de nostro gratulamur, et quorum lucra nostra deputamus. Scimus enim quia in omni loco uni Deo servitur, et quia una est Catholica et Apostolica Ecclesia sive Romana sive Transmarina; nostrum igitur est vobis illum canonice concedere, vestrum autem honorifice suscipere, ea scilicet ratione atque tenore tam ad gloriam regni vestri, quam ad honorem ecclesiæ et præsulatus nostri, eum ad vos mittendum cum suis electoribus, et cum nonnullis regni vestri proceribus vel optimatibus tam episcopis scilicet, presbyteris, diaconibus, quam etiam religiosis laicis, qui nobis viva voce in præsentia totius ecclesiæ nostræ profiteantur atque promittant, eum condigno honore se habituros omni tempore vitæ suæ; nec non decreta canonica, et sanctiones ecclesiasticas ab apostolis, et apostolicis viris ecclesiæ traditas, quæ tunc a nobis audire et videre, et postea ab eodem suo pastore et doctore secundum formam a nobis traditam discere poterint, cunctis diebus irrefragabiliter velle custodire. Quod quum fecerint divina benedictione, et beati Reinigii auctoritate per nostrum ministerium, et impositionem manuum more ecclesiastico decenter ordinatum, et in omnibus plenissime instructum accipientes illum sibi cum debito honore deducant ad propriam sedem alacres, et læti ipsi omni tempore patrocinio illius fruituri, doctrinaque et exemplo ejus jugiter instruendi.

Quia vero sollicita sunt pro se invicem membra et vel uno gaudente congaudeant, vel uno patiente compatiuntur cætera membra, vestræ regiæ celsitudini ac providentissimæ mansuetudini deinceps illum attentius, ac specialius commendamus, quatinus quicquid ad honestatem ecclesiæ, et eruditionem gentis vestræ congruum, et utile secundum

canonicam auctoritatem, et ecclesiæ nostræ consuetudinem potuerit invenire, libera auctoritate absque ullius contradictione semper possit docere et opere adimplere: ne forte, quod absit, diabolico quispiam instinctu contra eum zelo livoris et malivolentiæ ductus, controversiam moveat aut seditionem concitet.

Vestrum itaque erit hoc omnino providere ac regia censura tales, si qui forte exorti fuerint, omnimodis reprimere, barbariemque feritatem freno vestri moderaminis cohibere; illius autem pastoralis solertia, sibi commissorum saluti semper consulere et post se universos potius amore trahere quam terrore cogere.

Gaudeat semper ac vigeat in Christo Rege regum, et Domino dominorum vestra dignitas nobilissima, pietas sanctissima, nec non fortitudo invictissima.

NO. VI. ALFREDI REGIS PRÆFATIO AD PASTORALE SANCTI GREGORII.

This is seo forespræc hu S. Gregorius thas boc gedigte the man Pastoralem nemnath.

Ælfred kyning hateth gretan Bisceop his worthum luflice and freondlice, and the kythan hate thæt me com suithe oft on gemynd hwelce writan gio wæron geond Angel kynn, ægther ge godcundra hada, ge woruldcundra, and hu gesælig lica tida tha wæron geond Angelcynn: and hu tha kyningas, the thone anwald hæfdon thæs folces, Gode and his ærendwrecum hirsumedon: and hu hi ægther ge hiora sibbe ge hiora sido ge hiora anwald innan borthes gehioldon, and eac ut hiora cæthel rymdon: and hu him tha spreow ægther ge mid wige ge mid wisdom: and eac tha godcundan hadas hu georne hie wæron ægther ge ymb lere ge ymb leornunga, and ymb ealle tha theowutdomas the hie Gode don sceoldon, and hu mon utan bordes wisdom and lare hider on lond sohte, and hu we hi nu sceoldon ute begietan gif we hie

habban sceoldon, swa clæne hio wæs othfeallenu on Angelkynne, thæt te swithe feawe wæron behionan Humbre the hiora thenunga cuthen understandan on Englisc, oththe furthum an ærendgewrit of Lædene on Englisc areccan, and hic wene thæt te nauht monige begeondan Humbre næren, swa feawe hiora wæron, thætte ic furthum anne anlepone ne mæg gethincean be suthan Temese : tha tha ic to rice feng, Gode ælmichetegum sithone thætte we nu ænigne on stal habbath lareowa. Fortham ic the bebeode thæt thu doo, swa ic gelife thæt thu wille, thæt thu the thissa woruld thinga to thæm ge æmettige, swa thu oftost mæge, thæt thu thone wisdom, the the God sealde, thær thær thu hine befæstan mæge, befeaste. Gethene hwelc witu us tha becomon for thisse worulde, tha tha we hit no hwæther ne selfe ne lufedon, ne eac othrum monnum ne lifdon, thone naman anne we hæfdod thæt te we Cristene wæron, and swithe feawe tha theawas. Tha ic tha this eall gemunde, tha gemunde ic eac hu ic geseah, ær thæm the hit eall foreheregod wære and forbærned, hu tha cirican geond eall Angell kynn stodon mathma and boca gefylða, and eac micel menigu Godes theowa and tha swithe lytle feorme thara. boca wiston, forthæm the hie heora nan wuht ongietan ne meahton, fortham the hie næron on hiora ægen getheode awritene, swelce hie cwæden ure ieldran, tha the thas stowa ær-hioldon, hie lufedon wisdom, and thurh thone hi begeaton welan and us læfdon. Her non mæg giet gesion hiora swæth, ac we him ne cunnon æfter spyrgan, forthæm we habbath nu ægther forlæten ge thone welan ge thone wisdom : fortham the we noldon to thæm spore mid ure mode onlutan. Tha ic tha this eall gemunde. tha wundrode ic swithe thara godena witena the gui wæron geond Angel cynn, and tha bec be fullan ealla geleornod hæfdon, thæt hi hiora tha nanne dæl noldon on hiora ægen gethiode wendan. Ac ic tha sona eft me selfum andwyrde and cwæth, hie ne wændon thæt te æfre men sceoldon swa reccelease weorthan and sio lar swa othfeallan, for thære wilnunga hie hit forleton and woldon thæt

her thy mara wisdom on londe wære thy we ma gethioda cuthon. Tha gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest on Ebreisc gethioðe funden, and eft tha tha hie crecas geleornodon, tha wendon hi hie on hiora ægen gethioðe ealle, and eac ealle othre bec. And eft Læden ware swa same, siththan hi hie geleornodon, hi hie wendon ealle thurh wise wealh stodas on hiora agen getheode, and eac ealla othra Cristena thioda sumne dæl hiora on hiora agen gethioðe wendon, forthy me dyneth betre, gif iow swa thyneth, thæt we eac sum bec, tha the nid bethyrfesta sien eallum monnum to witanne, thæt we tha on thæt getheode wenden the we ealle gecnawan mægen, and gedon swa we swithe eathe magon mid Godes fultume, gif we tha stilnesse habbath, thætte eal sio gioguth the nu is on Angel kynne friora monna, thara the tha sweda hæbben thæt hie thæm befeolan mægen, sien to leornunga othfæste, tha hwile the hi to nanre otherre note ne mægen, oth thone first the hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan, lære mon siththan furthur on Læden getheode tha the mon furthor læran wille and to hierran hade don wille. Tha ic tha gemunde hu sio lar Læden getheodes ær thysum othfeallen wæs geond Angel kynn, and theah monege cuthon Englisc gewrit arædan, tha ongan ic on gemang othrum mislicum et monigfaldum bisgum disses kynesces tha boc wendan on Englisc the is genemned on Læden Pastoralis and on Englisc Hirde boc, hurlum word be worde, hurlum ondgite, swæ swæ ic hie geleornode æt Plegmunde minum Arcebiscepe, and æt Asserie minum Biscepe, and æt Grimbolde minum mæssepreoste, and æt Johanne minum mæssepreoste. Siththan ic hie tha geleornod hæfde, swæ swæ ic hie forstod, and swæ ic hie andgitfullicost areccean mæhte, ic hie on Englisc awende, and to ælcum Biscopstole on minumrice wille ane onsendan, and on ælere bith an Æstel se bith on fiftigum moncessa. Ond ic bibrode on Godes noman thæt nan mon thone Æstel from thære bec ne doe, ne tha boc from thæm mynstre, uncuth hu longe thær swæ gelærede Biscopas sien, swæ swæ nu Gode thonc well hwær sindon. For thy ic wolde thætte

hie ealneg æt thære stowe wæren, buton se Biscep hie mid him habban wille oththe hio hwær to læne sie, oththe hwa othre bi write.

TRANSLATION^d.

Alfred the king, to Wulfsig, his beloved bishop and friend, Greeting! I wish you to know that it often occurs to my mind to consider, what manner of wise men there were formerly in the English nation, both Spiritual and Temporal, and how happy the times then were among the English, and how the kings, who then had the government of the people, obeyed God and His written will, how well they behaved both in war and peace, and in their domestic government, and how they prospered in knowledge and in wisdom. I considered also how earnest God's ministers then were, as well about preaching as about learning, and about all the service which they did to God, and men came from foreign countries to seek wisdom and doctrine in this land, and how we who live in these times are now obliged to go abroad to get them. To so low a depth has learning fallen among the English nation, that there have been very few on this side of the Humber, who were able to understand the English of their service, or to turn an epistle out of Latin into English; and I know there were not many beyond the Humber who could do it. There were so few, that I cannot think of one on the south side of the Thames, when I first began to reign. God Almighty be thanked that we have always a teacher in the pulpit now. Therefore I pray you to do what I believe you will be ready to do, that you will bestow all the wisdom, which God has given you, on all around you, as far as you are able. Think what punishment shall for this world befall us, if we turn out to have neither loved wisdom ourselves, nor to have taught it to others: if we have loved only the name of Christianity, and very few of us have discharged its duties. When I thought of all this, I fancied

^d The translation is Spelman's, with the phraseology slightly altered.

also that I saw (before every thing was ravaged and burnt) how all the Churches throughout the English nation stood full of books, ornaments, and a multitude of ministers for God's service: though at that time they gathered very little fruit from their books, not being able to understand them, because they were not written in their own language. They told us, that our ancestors, who before us held those places, loved wisdom, and through the same got wealth, which they left to us. A man may here yet see their *Swath*, but we cannot enquire after it, because we have let go both wealth and wisdom, neither would we stoop with our minds to the seeking of it. When I thought of all this, then I wondered greatly that their godly wise men, that were every where to be found throughout the English nation, and had fully learned all those books, would turn no part of them into their own language; but to this I speedily found an answer, and said, ' They thought not that men ever would become so reckless, or that this learning would ever so decay: wherefore they were glad to let it alone, and thought that there would be the more wisdom in the land in proportion to the number of languages that we understood. I then called to mind that the Law was first written in the Hebrew tongue, and that when the Greeks learned it, they translated it entirely into their own language, besides many other books. And after them the Latins, when they learned it, translated it, by means of wise interpreters, into their own language, as all other Christian people also have turned some part of it also into their own tongue. For which reason I think it best, if you too think so, that we also should turn into the language which we all of us know, some such books as are deemed most useful for all men to understand, and that we do our best to effect, as we easily may, with God's help, if we have quietness, that all the youth of free-born Englishmen, such as have wealth enough to maintain them, be brought up to learn, that at an age when they can do nothing else, they may learn to read the English language then, and that afterwards the Latin

tongue shall be taught to those whom they have it in their power to teach and promote to a higher degree. When I reflected how this learning of the Latin tongue had fallen throughout the English nation, though many knew how to read English writing, I then began, in the midst of the divers and manifold affairs of this kingdom, to turn into English this book, which in Latin is named 'Pastoralis,' and in English the 'Herdsmen's Book,' sometimes word for word, and sometimes sense for sense, even as I learned them of Plegmund my archbishop, of Asser my bishop, Grimbald my mass-priest, and John my mass-priest. After I had learned of them how I might best understand them, I turned them into English, and will send one of them to every bishop's see in my kingdom, and upon^e each of them there is a Style [æstel] of fifty marks; and I command, in God's name, that no man take the Style from the books, nor the books from the Minster, seeing that we know not how long there shall be such learned bishops, as now, God be thanked! there every where are. Therefore it is my wish that these remain every where in their places, unless the bishop will have them with him, or that they shall be lent somewhere or other until a copy of them shall be written out.

NO. VII. CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF ANGLO-SAXON
HISTORY, FROM 802 TO 900.

802. Egbert succeeds to the throne of Wessex on the death of Bertric. See page [20](#).
802. was the 7th year of Cuthred, king of Kent.
the 4th of Sigered, king of Essex.
the 9th of Kenwolf, king of Mercia.
the 6th of Ardwolf, king of Northumberland.
805. Cuthred, king of Kent, dies. p. [21](#).
806. Ardwolf expelled from Northumberland. p. [21](#).
819. Kenwolf, king of Mercia, dies, and is succeeded by Kenelm, who is murdered a few months after, and his uncle Keolwolf succeeds. p. [25](#).
821. Keolwolf expelled, and Bernwolf becomes king of Mercia. p. [25](#).
823. Battle of Ellandune, in which Egbert defeats Bernwolf, king of Mercia. p. [26](#).
Bernwolf slain by the East Anglians. p. [27](#).
- 823 or 824. Ludecan becomes king of Mercia. p. [27](#).
823. Egbert sends an army under Prince Ethelwolf, Alderman Wolfherd, and Bishop Alstan, who conquer Kent, Essex, and Sussex. p. [27](#).
- Baldred, king of Kent, flees beyond the Thames. p. [28](#).
825. Ludecan, king of Mercia, is slain in East Anglia, and Wiglaf becomes king. p. [28](#).
827. Wiglaf is driven from his kingdom by Egbert, but in 828 is allowed to return. p. [28](#).
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THE END.

CORRIGENDA.

Page 16. line 14. *for* eight *read* ten

four six.

69. 17. *for* their invasions *read* the invasions of their enemies

72. 1. **ETHELBERT** **ETHELRED**

73. 16. 1200 1300

126. note⁴. I have since observed, that Lappenberg makes two reinforcements to have reached the Danish army; one after the battle of Basing, [Thorpe's Lappenberg, vol. ii. p. 41.] the other after that of Merton, [p. 45.]

126. *last line*. Since writing this note, I have lighted on the following passage in Brompton, [p. 809.] "After two months they again met in battle at Merton, and the English were defeated. Then a certain Danish tyrant, named Somerled, marching to Reading, destroyed the town, and all he found in it. After this, King Ethelred engaged with him in battle, and received a mortal wound, of which he died after much suffering on the 23d of April, in the 5th year of his reign, and was buried at Wimbourne."

188. line 18. *for* life *read* reign

237. line 18. *for* Monty House *read* Montys Court

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